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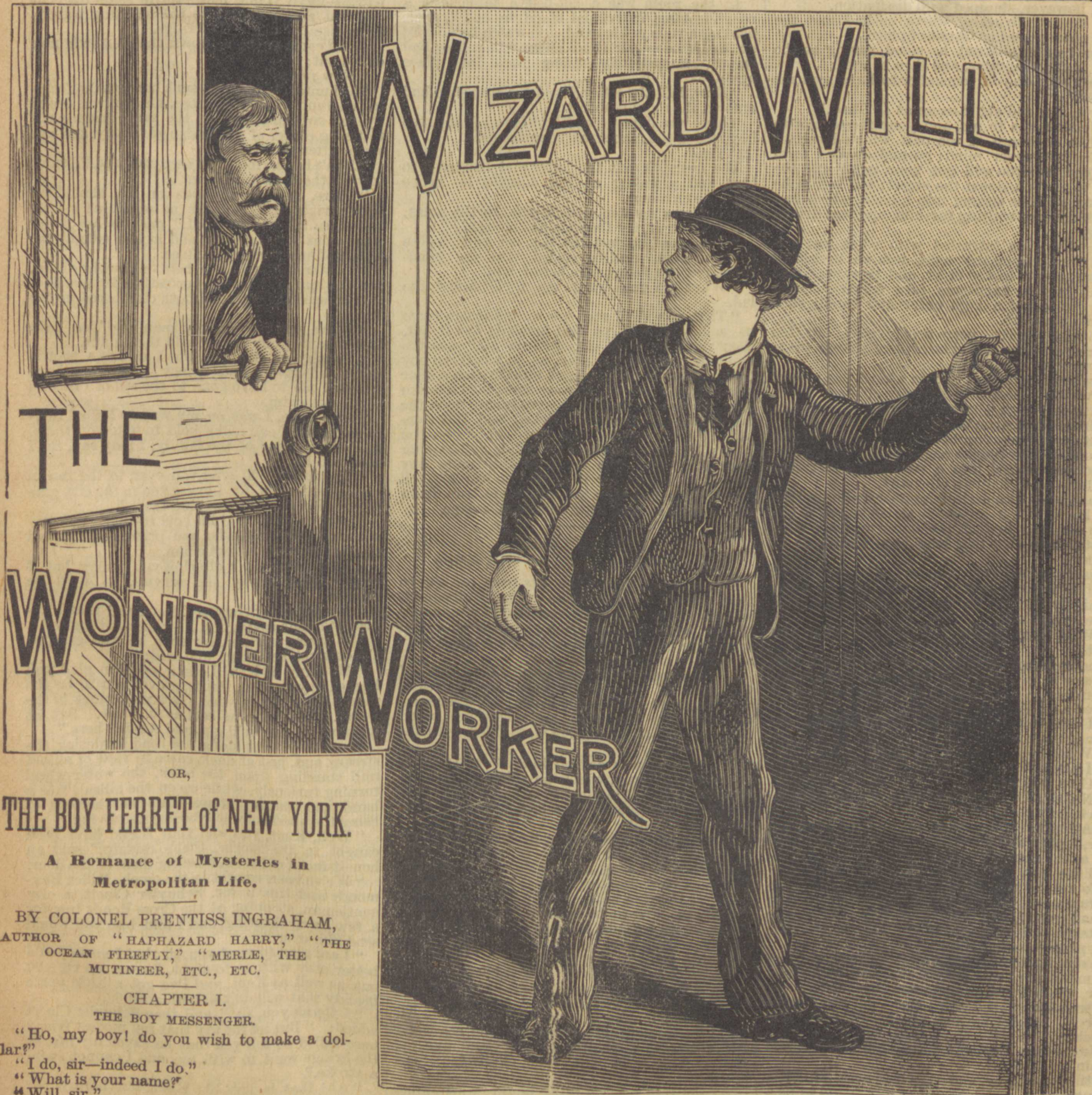
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OR,

THE BOY FERRET of NEW YORK.

A Romance of Mysteries in
Metropolitan Life.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "HAPHAZARD HARRY," "THE
OCEAN FIREFLY," "MERLE, THE
MUTINEER, ETC., ETC."

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY MESSENGER.

"Ho, my boy! do you wish to make a dol-
lar?"

"I do, sir—indeed I do."

"What is your name?"

"Will, sir."

"I WISH TO SEE JERRY, THE NIGHT HAWK," ANSWERED WILL PROMPTLY

"Well, Will, can you keep your mouth shut?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "Can you be blind, if need be?"
 "You mean, not see anything that is not intended for me to see, sir?"

"Yes."
 "I understand, sir."
 "Well, it is important that this letter reaches a friend of mine, as I cannot go myself, so you take it to the number; can you read?"
 "Yes, sir."

"Well, take it to the number on the envelope, and ring the bell sharply three times; then ask for Jerry, the Night Hawk; will you remember the name?"

"Yes, sir—Jerry, the Night Hawk."
 "Yes, that's it; and you must give him the letter in person."

"Suppose he is not there, sir?"
 "Then find out when he will be, and keep the letter for him; and see, I write on the back here for him to give you a couple of dollars, after which go your way, and forget all about what you have done."

"Yes, sir," and the boy took the note and turned to depart to the address on the envelope, when he was called back, while the man stood in silent thought.

He was a gentlemanly looking person, with a face, however, stamped with dissipation.

In the neighborhood where he had met the boy, he appeared to be out of place.

For half a moment he stood, gazing at the face of the youngster, and then he said:

"My boy, do you remember to have seen me before?"

"No, sir; and yet it seems as if I had."

"It so seems to me, and your face comes to me like a dream of the past which I cannot recall; but—never mind; go and do as I have told you, and you will get your pay," and the man walked on down the street; but before he had gone far he sprang into a hack, which had evidently been waiting for him, and was driven away.

The boy thus intrusted with what was evidently an important note, was an urchin of twelve; but he looked older, and there was that in his bright, handsome face which denoted both courage of a high order and intelligence beyond his years.

He was poorly, very poorly clad, but his clothing was clean, and he evidently took pride in appearing at his best.

The locality he was in was a hard one, one of the worst localities in the city of New York, and rude, rough characters—men, women and children—were upon the streets.

But the lad went on his way without noticing any one, and, as though acquainted with his surroundings, turned into a wretched street that was little more than an alleyway.

He stopped at a certain number and seized the bell knob, which appeared to belong to a by-gone age, and in fact, the house was a quaint old structure that had long been the abode of poverty.

His three sharp rings, as he had been directed to give, were answered by the door opening, seemingly without human agency, while a gruff voice demanded:

"Well, step inside and tell me what you want?"

The messenger stepped into a small hallway, and saw before him, only a few feet distant, another door, while, through an open panel in it peered a man's face.

"I wish to see Jerry, the Night Hawk," explained the youngster.

"What do you want with him?"

"I have a letter for him."

"Give it to me."

"No, sir, for I have orders from my boss to give it only to Jerry."

"All right, you can go up and see him, top floor, right hand side front room," was the reply, and as the man spoke the other door closed behind the boy, the one in his front opened, and he found he was in a hallway, into which no doors opened, other than the one through which he had passed, and in the rear was only a pair of stairs occupying the entire width of the narrow passageway.

A dim light came from above somewhere, and the messenger ascended the stairs to the second floor, where he saw doors upon either side.

Ascending to the third floor, he sought the door to where he had been directed, and knocked.

No answer came, and he waited a while and again knocked.

Still no answer, and then his eyes fell upon a small knob, which he pulled and found to be a bell.

Still no response, and the thought came to him to ring it three times, as he had the bell below stairs.

This he did, and instantly he heard a voice behind him.

"Well, youngster, what is it you are after?"

He was startled, and turning saw a man's face at a panel in the door.

"I wish to see Jerry, the Night Hawk," answered Will, promptly.

"What do you want?"

"That will tell him," was the cool reply.

"Well, Jerry, the Night Hawk."

The boy looked incredulous, and the man opened the door, and came to him to enter.

This he did, and found himself in a hallway that was perfectly square, and the light came in to it from above through a skylight.

There was no door in this hall, except the one by which he had entered, but the man said:

"Is there an answer?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, when he had meant to say no, but he did not correct himself, and instantly the man tapped three times upon the wooden wall of the hallway.

To the new surprise of the boy one side of it was at once run upward, revealing a small room, and into this the two stepped, the man telling the youngster to follow.

In the room was a cot-bed, a table, and a rough-looking individual stood in one corner, holding a rope in his hand, and which he now let go, the wooden partition, under which they had passed, immediately sliding back into place again.

"Now, lad, the letter," said the man who had entered the room with him.

"Are you Jerry, the Night Hawk?" and the boy looked the man straight in the eyes.

"Yes."

The boy took out the letter and handed it to him, and glancing at the address he broke open the envelope.

What was written within was to the point, and very short, for the man at once said:

"Yes, you are just the boy we want, as the captain says," and he gazed into the handsome, fearless young face before him.

"What do you want me for?" asked the lad.

"That you shall soon know, and if you serve us well, you will be well treated; but if not, then you'll have to die, that is all," was the ominous reply of the man, as he seized the boy by the shoulder and dragged him through a door into a large room where were assembled a dozen men, whose scowling faces were turned upon the lad with a look that was wicked and threatening. As he recalled the words of Jerry, the Night Hawk, and beheld the wild, evil-looking men about him, the heart of the brave boy shrank with fear, for it needed no words to tell him that he had been led into some trap from which there seemed little chance of escape.

CHAPTER II.

AN OATH TO WIN, A VOW TO AVENGE.

THE scene of my story shifts from the city to the country. A young man, evidently city-bred, was standing beneath the shelter of a woodman's shanty, while the rain poured in torrents, and sent little brooks surging like miniature rivers adown the hillsides.

It was in one of the most beautiful localities of the State of Maryland, where forest, stream, woodland and vale stretched away in picturesque attractiveness for miles, and where the broad fields of well-to-do farmers were filled with the golden grain.

The young man was clad in huntsman's garb, carried a shot-gun, which he shielded from the dampness, and at his feet crouched a dog, while the game-bag hanging on a limb near-by proved the hunter's skill.

It was approaching sunset time, and the storm had been raging for a couple of hours, the rainfall being so heavy as to deluge the country, and make foaming torrents of mere rivulets.

"It is clearing now, and I will venture, for I would not like to be caught in the woods by darkness, as I would have to remain all night," and the hunter gazed up anxiously at the clouds, breaking away in the westward.

He was a man of twenty-six, perhaps, and his erect form, elegant manners and handsome face had won many a girl's heart.

A Philadelphian, and the ideal of society, he had run away from dissipation and comrades for a few days' shooting in Maryland, and his first day of sport had been checked by the storm.

As the rain ceased falling he threw his game-bag over his shoulder and started out upon his

return to the little Cross-Roads Inn where he was stopping.

He had to pick his way carefully, and often, as it was, he went into water nearly up to the top of his boots.

At last he came to a rustic bridge, across a brook; but the brook was now surging beyond its banks, and driving furiously along.

"Ho, don't cross there!" cried a voice from the other shore.

But the hunter heeded not the warning and sprang upon the bridge.

It was tottering, for its foundations had become undermined; but he hastened on; it trembled, swerved, rocked, and he sprang quickly toward the other shore, but too late, as before and behind him the spans were torn away, and the centre one, upon which he stood must go next.

"Ah! I cannot swim, and am lost!" he cried, in a tone of horror.
 "I will save you," shouted the same voice from the shore.

Then followed the words: "Throw your gun and game-bag away, and spring clear of the wreck when I call to you."

The hunter tossed his fine gun and game-bag from him and nerved himself for the ordeal.

He saw the one who had called to him—a tall, fearless-faced young man—throw aside his coat and hat and plunge into the whirling waters, some distance above the bridge.

As he came sweeping down the bold swimmer called out:

"Now jump!"

The hunter obeyed, and sunk beneath the foaming current; but, as he arose, his arm was seized by the swimmer, and at the same instant the tottering center of the bridge gave way, and was swept after them.

"Don't be alarmed, but keep cool, and I'll work toward the bank with you."

"There, put your hands on my shoulders! That's right, and you are as serene as a May morn; so all will be well," and the swimmer struck out for the bank, and at last caught the bough of an overhanging tree.

It blistered his hands to hold on; but he did so, and the hunter, who was perfectly self-possessed, also grasped the tree, and both clambered up the bank.

"I owe you my life, my man, and you have but to name your price," said the hunter.

"Thank you, stranger, but I am not a professional life-saver, and money would not have tempted me to have gone to the aid of one who could not swim."

"But come, I was on my way to Miller Raymond's, and I can make bold to take you there, as I'm about one of the family, I may say, for I soon will be."

"The miller will send you over to the inn in his spring wagon, for I guess you're the city gentleman I heard was stopping there."

The hunter saw that his bold rescuer, evidently a farmer, was one who had pride, and merited the treatment of a gentleman.

"I beg pardon for offering you money, but it could never repay the service, so we'll be friends."

"My name is Schuyler Cluett, and that I appreciate your saving my life you must know."

The young farmer, for such he was, grasped the outstretched hand, and said:

"My name is Kent Lomax, and I'm glad you begged my pardon, for it proves you to be the man I thought you when I saw your pluck in the water. You were as cool as an icicle. But let us move on, for we'll get cold staying here."

So on they went along the road bordering the stream, and, just at dark, came in view of an old mill standing upon the bank, the water-wheel turning furiously, while up on the hillside was a handsome country house, that had the look of being the abode of one who enjoyed living.

"Well, Kent, you and your friend have been caught in the storm, that's certain," said an honest-faced old man, meeting them at the door.

"We've been caught in the creek, Miller Raymond; and this is Mr. Schuyler Cluett, a city gentleman, stopping at the Cross-Roads Inn, for a few days' shooting, and I told him you would send him over."

"I am glad to meet you, sir; but I guess you'd better stay with us to-night, for we can rig you out, as well as Kent, and I've got a little apple brandy that will do you both good."

"I thank you, sir," and then Schuyler Cluett added: "But let me say that my modest friend here failed to tell you that he saved my life, as the bridge went in with me, and I cannot swim a stroke."

"Ah! that is just like Kent; but here is my daughter, and he saved her life years ago in this

same stream, when they were children together. Ruby, this is Mr. Cluett, whose life Kent just saved; but hasten to lay out some of my clothes in the spare rooms, and tell your mother that we have guests to supper.

"Come, Mr. Cluett, you and Kent need a little internal warming up after your ducking," and the two young men dashed off a glass of apple brandy of the miller's own making, and then sought their respective rooms to change their clothes, for, after his eyes had fallen upon Ruby Raymond, the young hunter had decided to remain all night at the miller's.

He felt that he did not look his best, in a corduroy suit of the miller's and a broad shirt collar; but he had to make the best of it, and so descended to the parlor.

Kent was already there, as was Miller Raymond, his wife, and Ruby, and the young hunter was introduced, and again told the story of his rescue by Kent.

Then supper was served, and such a supper Schuyler Cluett had never sat down to before, he said, and with truth, for Mistress Raymond was noted for her housekeeping the country over.

During the evening Ruby sang, in a sweet soprano voice, played the piano with a skill that surprised the city-bred gentleman, and he found her to be lovely in face and form, with large, dark-blue eyes, golden hair, and a smile of most fascinating sweetness, while her refinement of manner was as much a surprise to him as were her accomplishments.

Mr. Schuyler Cluett also learned a secret from the miller, and that was the fact of Ruby's engagement to Kent Lomax.

"Kent is a fine fellow, Mr. Cluett," volunteered the miller, and we have known him from boyhood.

"His father married a cross-grained woman after his first wife's death, and she made it so warm for the boy he ran away and went to sea.

"He was gone six years, and returned one day to find his step-mother dead, so he remained at home, took care of his father until his death, and now owns the farm, a mile from here, and a good one it is.

"He and Ruby have loved each other always, and they are to be married, come Christmas."

Schuyler Cluett went to his room that night, pondering over all he had heard, and at last he said half aloud:

"That beautiful girl marry that common fellow? Never! she shall be mine, and I swear it!"

And Schuyler Cluett kept his treacherous oath against the man who had saved his life, for the very eve of her wedding-day with Kent Lomax, Ruby Raymond stole out of her pleasant room, unlocked the front door, and glided across the lawn to the foot of the hill, where in a buggy, with a pair of spirited horses, sat a young man awaiting her.

"Come, hasten, Ruby," he said in a low tone.

"Oh, Schuyler, I have given up all for you, my parents, my happy home, and poor Kent.

"It will break his heart; but then it would have broken my heart to become his wife loving you as I do."

And away sped the fleet horses, while the night wore on, the dawn came, Christmas morn, and Mrs. Raymond hastened to her daughter's room, to wish her only child a happy Christmas, a happy wedding day.

A shriek that broke from her lips, followed by a heavy fall, brought the miller to the room.

His wife lay unconscious on the floor, an open letter in her hand.

He read it, and his heart grew cold at the words:

"Forgive me, mother, father, forgive me; but I could not marry Kent, as I do not love him, my heart being another's."

"Finding out the secret of my heart, I would not perjure myself by marrying Kent Lomax, and so I fly to-night with the one whose wife I am to be.

"Some day, when you feel more kindly toward me, I will come back and plead for your forgiveness."

"Now good-by, and God bless you and poor Kent, whom my heart bleeds for in the sorrow I know he will feel."

"Your ever loving daughter, "RUBY."

Loud and stern rung the miller's voice, calling for aid, and one servant was dispatched for the village doctor, for Mrs. Raymond still lay in a swoon and another for Kent Lomax.

They arrived together, and Kent Lomax looked like a corpse as the miller read his daughter's letter, for the eyes of the deserted lover were blinded with grief and all seemed blurred before him.

"Miller Raymond," said the doctor softly, as he bent over the form of the mother.

"Well."

"Nerve yourself for another bitter blow."

"Oh God! another?"

"Your wife is dead," was the low response, and the miller groaned, as he sunk upon his knees by the body of his wife and grasping her hand buried his face in the pillow by the side of the one who had for twenty years borne his name, the mother of his child who had struck the death-blow.

"Dead! dead!" shouted Kent Lomax with wild eyes and writhing face.

"That man did this deed, for he fascinated poor Ruby, won her from me, from home, from all, and by the eternal Heaven I will track him to his death for this!"

"I saved his life once, but now I will take away that life; I vow it, so help me God!"

CHAPTER III.

TRACKED TO HIS LAIR.

THERE were no handsomer bachelor rooms, in the city of Philadelphia, than were those of Schuyler Cluett, the handsome young gallant and "man about town."

Society said he was very rich, that he had been left a large fortune by an uncle, and many were the young ladies who sought to win favor in his eyes.

His rooms consisted of a suite of five, for there was his parlor, combined with sitting-room, his bed-chamber, a spare one for a belated guest, a snug little kitchen that was also used as a breakfast room, and a sleeping place for a servant.

All were delightfully furnished, and the young bachelor was wont to take his breakfast at ten, his valet getting the meals for him, while his dinners and suppers he always took at the fashionable True Blue Club, of which he was a popular member.

At a stable near he kept his coupe and riding-horse, with a coachman, so that he lived in very great comfort; in fact, it amounted to luxury.

His bills were always promptly paid at the end of the month; he dressed with elegance, took the best seats at the opera and theaters, was able to take a run around to Long Branch, Cape May, Newport, Saratoga and the White Mountains in the summer, and having spare money always with him to loan a friend an X or a XX, he was rated a good fellow among the men.

One night, about one, A. M., Schuyler Cluett was preparing to retire, and a friend who had accompanied him home had been shown to the spare room, which also opened into the parlor, so that the two talked as they undressed.

"That deuced valet of mine is always away when I need him most," growled the young bachelor.

"Now, here he is off at a ball, and why servants must have balls I cannot understand, and both you and I, Rayford, are half drunk, and need him to look after our comfort."

"It's too bad!" sung out Rayford from his room.

"I'd discharge him, Schuyler."

"I will, and I do. I discharge him every day, but I hire him over again before he gets off, and that spoils him; so I'll discharge him some time for a week, and it will teach him a lesson—ah! there he is now, and I'll have to go out in the hall and let him in, for he's forgotten his night key," and Schuyler Cluett went to the door to answer a ring.

As the door opened, he began to berate his valet, as he supposed it was, but was considerably taken aback at beholding a stranger enter the hall.

He failed to recognize him at first, but suddenly beheld him in the full light of the parlor, whither the stranger had strode with the remark:

"I wish to see you, Mr. Schuyler Cluett."

"Ho, Lomax, my dear fellow, I did not know you; but you look ill and something has surely happened, for you are as haggard as though after a long illness," and Schuyler Cluett held out his hand.

"No, Cluett, I do not take the hand of a villain," was the stern reply of the young farmer.

"By Heaven! are you drunk? What do you mean?" and the eyes of the young aristocrat flashed, while his friend Rayford, half-dressed, peered out of his door, startled at the turn affairs had taken.

"I mean, Schuyler Cluett, that you, like a snake that you are, fascinated poor little Ruby Raymond, she that was to have been my wife."

"We were happy until you came, and she was all my own; but one unlucky day I dragged you away from death, and I took you to her home,

and from that moment you began to win her from me.

"I saw it all, I felt it all, for she became unhappy, and she told me she thought we should be as brother and brother, for she loved me, but not as a wife should."

She saw how it hurt me to hear her say so, and so she said she did not mean it; but she deceived me, for she did mean it, and one week ago, on the very eve of our wedding-day, you came like a thief in the night and stole her from me."

"Good God! Lomax, I am not guilty of this, and you wrong me, indeed you do!" cried Schuyler Cluett, his face the picture of amazement.

Kent Lomax seemed astounded, and asked, sternly:

"Do you deny it?"

"I do. Upon my honor, yes!"

"You deny that you ran off with Ruby Raymond from her father's house, at twelve o'clock on the night of Christmas Eve?"

"I do."

"You lie in your false throat, man!" shouted the farmer, and at his words Schuyler Cluett sprung toward him; but, quick as a flash, a pistol met him, the muzzle in his face, while the young farmer said, sternly:

"Back! I did not come here unprepared, and I would kill you, oh! how gladly!"

"I tell you I am falsely accused; and being unarmed, and knowing your great strength, I am forced to hear you accuse me and submit to your insults, Kent Lomax."

"Schuyler Cluett, I know that you are guilty, for I tracked you in your villainy."

"Yet you find me here in my bachelor rooms, and there is a friend who is with me, and can vouch for my words."

"I can, indeed, sir, for I know that my friend Cluett has been but two days absent from the city the week past," and Randal Rayford stepped out of his room into the parlor, he having hastily dressed as he saw that a tragedy was threatening.

"Ah! he was two days absent, then?"

"They are the two days in which he committed the crime of kidnapping and murder—"

"Murder? Good God! of what else will you accuse me, Lomax?"

"Yes, of murder; for when poor Mrs. Raymond read the note left by Ruby, she fell in a faint, and she never came to herself again, but died, and four days ago I went to see her buried over in the village graveyard."

"Then I took your track, Schuyler Cluett, and I found out where you hired your team of fast horses, and where you drove to catch the train."

"There you bought two tickets for Baltimore, and I lost trace of you after I arrived in that city."

"You have tracked some other man, Lomax, for your sweetheart did not run off with me."

"And I say that I saw the man of whom you hired your horses, and he described you."

"Other men look like me, Lomax."

"And I saw the station-agent where you took the train for Baltimore, and he described you, and Ruby, also."

"An accidental resemblance."

"A man met you at that station, to drive the horses back to the town where you hired them."

"That proves nothing."

"Does this?" and Kent Lomax drew from his pocket a handkerchief.

"That is a lady's handkerchief, I believe," was the cool reply.

"It was left by Ruby Raymond in the waiting-room of the railroad station, and it bears her name."

"That proves she did run off with some one; but who, Lomax, for I am not the guilty one?"

"Does this prove anything?" and the young farmer held up the gold head of a walking-stick.

Schuyler Cluett again started forward, as though to grasp it; but the pistol's muzzle once more confronted him, while Kent Lomax fairly hissed forth the words:

"This I found in the buggy, and there is the stick—see, it fits!" and stepping to a corner, he picked up a headless walking-stick of snake-root.

"You will not deny your guilt now, for this gold head bears your name, and it came off in the buggy, and you doubtless thought you had dropped it along the road."

"I say that I am not guilty," was the sulky reply.

"Well, sir, I say that you are, and I came here to kill you; but I will not be a coward and shoot down an unarmed man. Yet I will not

allow you to escape, for I intend to right the wrong I believe you have done poor Ruby, and I have vowed, over the dead body of Mrs. Raymond, to avenge her death."

"What is your intention, Lomax, for this scene is growing monotonous to me?"

"My intention is to demand that you meet face to face, arms in our hands, and as one gentleman should meet another, though I do not consider you worthy the name you have dishonored."

"By the Lord Harry! but this is too much, and I will meet you were you the lowest of the low; so name your friend, and Mr. Rayford here will arrange with him!" hotly said Schuyler Cluett.

"I have no friend, but that gentleman will do, and he is all we need."

"I will meet you at sunrise, at any place you may state, for I do not know this city, and our weapons will be revolvers, the distance ten paces, that gentleman to give the word to fire, and to keep it up until one or both are killed."

"That will suit me," was the cool reply, and turning to his friend, he continued:

"You will act for us, Rayford, in this affair this mad fool has forced upon me?"

"Certainly, and there is a pretty spot on the banks of the Schuylkill river we can select, for I know it well, and I will give this gentleman written instructions how to reach there."

"At sunrise you say?" and he turned to Kent Lomax.

"Yes, and sooner if it could be so."

"That is soon enough, and here is your direction to reach the spot," and he jotted down a few notes upon a paper.

"Thank you; and Schuyler Cluett if you prove yourself a coward and do not come, I will prove merciless and kill you at sight, as I would a snake," and Kent Lomax left the rooms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING.

UNTIL the time for him to seek some means of reaching the spot, selected for the meeting, that he intended should be fatal to one of them, Kent Lomax walked the streets of the city, brooding deeply over his sorrows, and his determination to avenge Ruby, whom he looked upon with pity rather than anger, and her mother, whose death had been brought on by the act of Schuyler Cluett.

At daylight he sought a livery stable, and asked for a horse to ride out to the rendezvous.

"You can get a horse, sir, but you are unknown to us, and we must ask a deposit of his value," said the man.

"Ah! that is it, you fear I am a horse-thief; well, hitch up a carriage for me and send a driver, one who knows how to reach this place," and he gave the directions where he wished to go.

Soon after he sprang into the vehicle and was driven away at a rapid pace, and, in an hour's time was set down at a lonely spot on the river-bank.

Up the stream some distance he saw another vehicle draw up, and out of it sprang Schuyler Cluett and Rayford, and he walked hastily toward them.

"I am glad to see that you are not a coward," said Kent Lomax, addressing Schuyler Cluett.

"You are all wrong in this, Lomax, much as appearances are against me," said Cluett.

"I know I am right, for I have not had my eyes shut the past two months."

"Are you ready?"

"I am."

"I have brought a pair of weapons belonging to Mr. Cluett, sir, and you can take your choice," said Rayford, opening a box in which were a pair of handsome revolvers.

"I have a weapon, sir."

"It is best that they be alike."

"Very well, I will take one of these."

"Take your choice."

Kent Lomax selected one without an instant of hesitation, and said:

"This will do."

Rayford took the revolver and carefully loaded it, and then he took up the other and did likewise.

Then he paced off ten paces, gave the men the choice of positions by tossing up a dollar, and Kent Lomax won.

Both took their positions, Schuyler Cluett with a quiet smile of confidence upon his face, and Kent Lomax calm, cold, but haggard, stern and determined.

The sun was now up, gilding the tree-tops and causing the dew to sparkle like diamonds upon the grass.

It was a pretty scene, and yet one that had been selected to be desecrated by a tragedy.

Each man took his position, revolver in hand, and standing to one side, Rayford said:

"Gentlemen, I am to give the word as follows:

"One, two, three, fire!"

"Between the words *three* and *fire*, you are to pull trigger, and you can keep firing until one or the other falls, or you empty your weapons."

"Now are you ready?"

Both nodded in the affirmative, and then in a loud voice came the fatal words:

"One! two! three!"

There was no need of uttering the word *fire*, for the revolver of each flashed at three.

And the result?

Schuyler Cluett staggered backward, his hand to his head, while Kent Lomax dropped as though a bullet had pierced his brain.

"Shot through the heart," said Rayford coolly, and then turning to his friend he added:

"I think that should cancel my indebtedness to you, Schuyler."

"What?"

"I put a ball of putty, wrapped with tin-foil, in his pistol, and even with it he left his mark in the dead center of your forehead, for it is bruised; but had it been lead, you would have been a dead man."

"Great God! did you do that?" asked Schuyler Cluett.

"I did."

"Rayford, I know not what to say; but as you have saved my life, I will call the debt square between us; but see, he is not dead, and I will put him in his carriage and send him to a hospital, for we must look to our own safety now."

This was done; the body of the wounded, unconscious man was placed in the carriage that had brought him out, and the driver ordered to take him to a hospital.

Then the two friends entered their own carriage, and were driven, by another road, rapidly back to the city.

The next morning the following notice of the affair appeared in the morning papers:

"A MYSTERIOUS DUEL."

"At dawn yesterday morning a young gentleman evidently from the country, judging from his dress and appearance, went to Tailor's livery stable and sought to hire a saddle-horse for a few hours; but, upon the price of the animal being demanded, as he was an utter stranger to the foreman, he called for a carriage and driver, and ordered the latter to drive him to a spot on the Schuylkill river, between the Laurel Hill Cemetery and the Wissamickon creek, and to lose no time in getting there."

"Upon reaching the spot he left the vehicle, just as another carriage drove up in the distance, and from it alighted two gentlemen."

"There the stranger walked on and met them, reports his driver, and the three conversed together for a moment; then two of them threw off their overcoats, while the third paced off a certain distance and, after loading two weapons taken from a case, handed them to the duelists."

"Word was then given, the driver supposes—for he was too far off to hear—and the pistols flashed together, one man staggering, as though wounded, the other falling as though dead."

"The driver was then called, and the one who lay prostrate was raised and placed in the vehicle which was ordered to drive with all speed to the Hospital, the others entering the carriage and driving rapidly off in another direction."

"Upon being questioned by our reporter, the driver of the stranger said that the other duelist was a young society man about town, but he did not, or pretended not to know his name."

"He said the stranger's bullet had wounded him in the head, as he wore a handkerchief about it, but there was no blood-stain visible."

"The comrade of the alleged society-man was also a young gentleman of this city, but whom the driver pretended not to know."

"Going to the Hospital our reporter discovered that the stranger was there."

"He had a watch, chain, seal-ring and sleeve-buttons all of good value, and a pocket-book containing several hundred dollars in bank-bills, but not a slip of paper, or anything to solve his identity."

"He was shot just over the heart, and the surgeons feared to probe the wound, which they say will doubtless prove fatal though there is the slightest chance for his recovery, as he possesses a fine physique and the appearance of an iron constitution."

"Reporters and detectives are busy trying to solve the mystery, and our readers will be informed if aught is discovered regarding this strange affair."

CHAPTER V.

THE BOY PROTECTOR.

AGAIN to the crowded metropolis my story shifts, and to a part of the grand city where dwell those of the humbler walks in life.

Here are no brown-stone fronts, no elegant homes, but the imprint of poverty is upon all.

Long years before the place was a fashionable locality; but the rapid growth of the city forced the wealthy residents up town, and into their homes, not then as now, superb structures, palatial in their fittings, the poorer classes moved, to again give place to those of a still lower strata of the society that goes to make up the world to be found in metropolitan life.

In a tenement-flat, on the fourth floor of a dingy-looking building, a woman sat alone, a piece of embroidery in her hands.

The flat consisted of four rooms, one large one in the front, with a hall-room adjoining, and the same in the rear.

Those in the front were used as sitting-room and bed-room; those in the rear, the larger one for a kitchen and dining-room combined, the smaller for a sleeping-chamber, for there was a cot in it.

The furniture was very scant, and very cheap-looking, there being nothing more than was actually necessary for use.

But an air of cleanliness was upon all, and the woman who sat alone in the front room had the appearance of one reared in refinement, one who had seen better days ere she had come to feel the pinching of poverty.

She was neatly clad in a black cashmere dress that was a trifle seedy, and which appeared to have been often brushed.

Her form was slender, very graceful, and her face was beautiful, yet very sad, very wretched in expression, while her large eyes were sunken and inflamed as though from weeping.

The work she was engaged upon ill accorded with the room and surroundings, for she was embroidering a silk scarf of a rare and costly pattern, and she kept it folded closely in a clean towel, excepting the part upon which her slender, skillful fingers worked.

An easel stood near her with a box of paints and brushes, and a half-finished painting was before her, a landscape scene, with a cosy country house, an old mill, a brook, and a valley stretching away in the distance.

Suddenly her eyes were raised from her work, and rested upon the canvas.

"Dear, dear old Brookside! how I long to see you once again, and yet I dare not go, even though I should have to beg my bread."

"Not one word in all these long, weary, wretched years have I heard from those whom I loved so dearly, and deserted to become the wife of—a scoundrel!"

"God forgive me that rash act; and forgive me for bringing sorrow upon my parents and poor Kent; but I was fascinated by that wretch—yes, fascinated, as though by a snake, for it was not love I felt, as now I hate him—no, no, I should not say that of the dead, of the father of my children," and she dropped her face in her hands and burst into tears.

Thirteen years have passed away since the reader last beheld her who sits there sobbing like a child, and the once beautiful girl of eighteen, pretty Ruby Raymond, the miller's daughter, has sadly changed in all that time.

Almost from the moment that she left her lovely, happy home, deserting her parents, and flying from the love of honest, brave Kent Lomax, her miseries had begun; and, too proud to return to dear old Brookside, though deserted by her husband, whom she afterward had heard was dead, she struggled on to support herself and her two children.

Not a word had she heard from her parents, and she would not write to them, fearing a rebuff.

Not a word had she heard from Kent Lomax, and, after all that she had done to break his heart, she would not seek his aid in her distress.

She had sewed, embroidered, and then taken up painting as a means of support; but her income was small, and she had to live very humbly.

Her children she sent to the public school, and she clothed them as well as she could.

"Oh! if I could only get a little money saved up, that, in disguise, I could go down to Brookside and see them all there, though they know me not!"

"I could leave my children with good-hearted Mrs. Lucas, next door, and be gone but a few days, for I would only wish to see the dear old home, to gaze upon the faces of my parents, to see Kent, and then come back to my wretchedness and toil; but I feel I could work the better if I could go."

"Still, I cannot, for it would take nearly fifty dollars to go and return, and I have but ten saved up, and it would not be right, if I had the money to spend it thus, for what if I should be taken sick, what would my little ones do?"

Again she buried her face in her hands and

wept, to start suddenly, hastily drying her eyes and, as a second knock came at the door, to call out:

"Come in!"

The door opened and a man entered.

He was a most unprepossessing looking person, one to dread, for he looked like a tramp in dress, and a scoundrel in his face.

The woman arose quickly, and asked as firmly as she could:

"Well, sir, what do you wish here?"

"I've come on business, missus, so don't go to squealin', fer I doesn't mean ter harm yer ef yer puts up ther chink as I tells you," was the reply in a sullen voice.

The woman saw that she was in the man's power, for to scream would bring no aid, as it would scarcely be heard above the din of the city.

Her children were at school, and there was no one to call upon.

The face of the man showed his evil heart, and in dread she said:

"I have but a few dollars in the world, and would you take that?"

"I would, you bet! for I needs money, and I'll git it, ef I has ter make trouble, so out with it."

The poor woman stepped to a little half desk, half-table, the place where she kept the few souvenirs of the past, and took therefrom a silk purse.

Out of this she took the money, eleven dollars in all.

"Let me keep one dollar," she pleaded, adding:

"I need it so much."

"Not a copper cent, missus, so hand it over."

"Here it is, eleven dollars."

"It is not enough, for I need more."

"It is all I have."

"You've got jewelry?"

"Only a little, souvenirs of my girlhood."

"Durn yer girlhood! Yer should fergit it; so hand it over."

"I will not!" she said firmly.

"Then I chokes that neck o' yours until you can't preach, and takes all."

"Mercy! you can have all," and she handed out a small box containing a few trinkets of little intrinsic value, but which she prized most highly.

"You've got some rings there."

"My wedding ring, and one other."

"They are worth somethin'."

"They are worth a great deal to me, for one tells me of a happy past, the other of only sorrow."

"One was give you by a lover, I guesses, and t'other by your husband."

"You are right."

"Well, I wants 'em."

"No! no! no! You would not take these."

"Come, I hain't no time to lose, for I'm wanted by the police, and to perfect myself, I'll jist tie you up, and put a bandage on that music-box o' yours, so you sha'n't shout when I gits out."

As he spoke he advanced toward her, and with a spring he grasped her arm, stifling a cry with his huge right hand.

At the same moment he fell like a log upon the floor, struck down by an iron poker held in the hand of a boy of twelve, who, unseen by the robber or his victim, had glided into the room from the back chamber, closely followed by a little girl of ten.

With a bound the woman sprung away from the man as he fell, while she cried in a voice of anguish:

"Oh, Will, my son, you have killed him!"

"I have but protected you, mother," was the reply of the brave boy, who stood over the prostrate form, the iron, which he had used as a weapon, still grasped in his hand.

CHAPTER VI.

A REWARD FOR A CONVICT.

THE boy who had entered the room and dealt what appeared to be a death-blow to the robber, was a handsome little fellow of twelve, well-grown for his age, with an agile, athletic form, and a face that would win attention anywhere.

He was poorly clad, yet his clothes were neat, and he had the look of one who had been reared in refinement, in spite of his humble and poverty-stamped surroundings.

Behind him, holding in her little hands her own and her brother's books, for the two had just come from school, was a little, fairy-like form of ten years.

Her face was bright, sparkling and lovely, with a look of wisdom and feeling above her years, while her attire was neat, fashionably-made, though of very cheap material, and there

was a certain style about her that many a millionaire's daughter on Fifth avenue would give much to possess.

"My son, you have killed him," repeated the mother, in a tone of horror.

"No—no, mother, for I did not hit him that hard; I don't think I did, at least, though I was very angry at seeing him spring at you, and I am so glad we came."

"We got a half-holiday this afternoon, and came in the back door to surprise you, when we heard that man talking, and I picked up the kitchen poker and—"

"But, Will, something must be done, and—"

The words ended in a startled cry, for the man suddenly rose up to a sitting posture.

But Will was equal to the situation, and raising his poker he cried out sternly:

"Lie down, sir! quick, or I will kill you!"

The half-dazed wretch saw that the boy held him at his mercy, and he dropped back again in a recumbent position.

"Run, Pearl, and get a policeman to come!" cried Will, and the young girl darted away, while the robber started to rise, with the remark:

"No police for me, boy— Oh!"

Back he fell, as the poker descended upon his head with a force that again stunned him.

"Oh, Will!" groaned the poor woman.

"I had to do it, mother, or he would have killed us both to get away, for he's a desperate fellow."

And the fearless boy stood over his prisoner with the air of one who meant to stand no trifling, and knew very well that he was master of the situation.

The man soon revived again, but a motion of the poker held over him, and a stern order, kept him on his back, for he had twice felt the weight of the boy's blow, and, bleeding from two scalp-wounds and with aching head, he concluded to remain quiet.

It seemed an age to the mother and son that Pearl was gone; but she had fairly flown to the nearest police precinct, and came dashing into the room breathlessly, crying:

"They are coming!"

Again the man moved uneasily, but the boy said sternly:

"Don't make me hit you again; but I will if you don't keep quiet."

"I'll even up on you some day, boy, if I go to prison for ten years!" growled the man; and as he spoke, there came steps upon the stairs without, and a sergeant and two policemen entered, as Pearl threw open the door.

The sergeant bowed politely, for the appearance of the lady commanded respect, and he said:

"Well done, my little man—ha! it is you is it, Black Brick?" and he turned his attention to the prisoner, who already was in irons, as the two officers had lost no time in getting the handcuffs upon him and placing him upon his feet.

"Yes, it's me, Sergeant Daly, and you put a cool thousand in your pocket by my capter," was the sullen reply, and then he added:

"I s'pose you won't share it with me fer givin' myself up?"

"My boy, this fellow you have caught is an escaped convict, and there's a thousand dollars' reward offered for his capture, which you can get by making an application for it."

"Thank you, sir, but neither my son or myself would accept money thus earned, poor as we are," said the lady quickly.

"You know best, madam," said the surprised sergeant, while the two officers also looked amazed.

"What is your name, my lad?" asked Sergeant Daly, taking out a note-book.

"Will Raymond, sir."

"And your name, madam, in full, please?" and the sergeant turned to the mother.

She choked up at the question, her face flushed and then paled; but after an effort at self-control she responded:

"My name was Ruby Raymond, and since my husband's death I retain the name for my children."

"Is it necessary that I should give another?"

"No madam, the name of Raymond will do; but you will not surely refuse the reward allowed for the capture of that rascal there!"

"I cannot allow my son to accept it, sir."

"Pardon me if I say I believe you need the money."

"I need it, sir, true; but not blood money, for I could not look upon it in any other way."

The sergeant bowed, gave a hasty glance about the rooms, and said to Will:

"Come and see me, my boy, and should you need a friend at any time call on me," and the

sergeant followed his men and their prisoner, after bowing politely to Mrs. Raymond.

As the door closed behind the officer Mrs. Raymond sprung toward her son, and throwing her arms about him, she cried earnestly:

"Oh, Willie, my noble boy, you have saved me more than you can ever know, for, poor as I am I would not take a fortune for this ring," and she held up a solid gold band before his eyes; *but it was not her wedding ring.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOST GOLD-PIECE.

SEVERAL months have passed away since the daring attempt of the escaped convict to rob Mrs. Raymond in her humble home, and a change has come that has brought gloom upon the mother and her two children.

It may have been the shock she had, when threatened by the intruder, that caused her to break down and take to her bed ill; but certain it is that she was forced to give up her work, she said for a day or two, and keep her children home from school.

Little Pearl was a good cook, however, and Will made the fires and did what little marketing there was, so that their mother did not suffer attention.

Still she fretted, and a fever followed, and Will went after a doctor on his own responsibility, and placed his mother in his care.

The man of medicine made three visits, and his pay took two-thirds of the little money the poor woman had, and she determined to get up and go to work to earn more.

But she could do but little, and, weak and wretched, she gained strength very slowly.

Then Will went out to see what he could get to do, and each night he came in with a few dimes, earned by blacking boots, running errands or selling papers, and this helped eke out a subsistence for all three.

Mrs. Raymond seemed not to suffer pain, she had no fever, but her ailment appeared to be heart trouble, and night after night she lay awake brooding over her sorrows.

Surprised, as the days passed, that Will seemed to be bringing in more money each day, she wondered at it, and questioned him, but he merely said that he picked it up in odd jobs.

"But, Will, you are looking pale and haggard, and you are working too hard," she said, seeing that he did look wan and white.

"No, mother, I'm all right," he answered, and so the conversation ended.

But that night Mrs. Raymond could not sleep, and growing strangely nervous, she went to wake up her son to talk to her for awhile.

To her surprise he was not in his little rear room adjoining the kitchen, and the bed had not been slept in.

She awakened Pearl and asked her about her brother.

"Oh, mamma, don't scold him, for he is at work," said Pearl, anxiously.

"Your brother at work, and at night?"

"Yes, mamma, for he has a place as night messenger in a telegraph office; he goes on at ten o'clock and gets off at six," explained Pearl.

"My poor boy! and this accounts for his being so hard to wake up every morning."

"Yes, mamma; but he sleeps in the daytime when he can, and you know he goes to bed early, but I always wake him up at half-past nine o'clock; and, oh, mamma! Will gets six dollars a week, only think of that!"

"And is killing himself, for he gets not half the sleep he should have."

"He must give it up, Pearl, for I will not allow him to ruin his health and slave his young life away as he is doing."

"But, mamma, you are sick, and Will makes so much, and you ought not to work."

But Mrs. Raymond was firm in her resolve, and when Will came creeping into his little room in the early morning, he was astonished at finding his mother lying in his bed, awaiting him.

In vain he argued; she would not hear of his continuing his night-work, and so Will Raymond left his place and looked for something else to do.

But nothing came in his way; times were hard, and but a few pennies a day were all the mother and her children had to live on.

Will seldom ate at home, saying that he got plenty at the lunch-counters during the day, and he left the scanty food for his mother and sister; but this his mother soon began to disbelieve, as the boy looked really ill and was growing thin.

"To-day is Thanksgiving Day, Will, so we must have a good dinner," said Mrs. Raymond, with a forced smile, one morning, after a most meager breakfast.

"Oh, mamma!" said Will, and his heart was too full to say more.

"My son, I have a gold-piece—a three-dollar piece given me years ago, and which I have held on to until now, never counting it in thinking of my finances; but I wish you to take it and go to some good market and invest a dollar at least in a good dinner," and the poor mother turned away to hide her tears, for the faces of her children told her plainly that they were hungry—yes, very hungry, as she was herself.

Will took the piece of gold, when his mother had taken it from its hiding-place, and placed it carefully in his pocket.

Then he started out upon his errand.

He was anxious to have his money go as far as possible, and yet secure the best, so he wended his way to a market, which had often attracted his attention.

Arriving at the market he feasted his eyes upon bunches of crisp, white celery, selected some fine sweet-potatoes, picked out a fine chicken, and then felt in his pocket for his money.

The marketman saw him turn pale as death, and then say, in a whisper, which he knew was not feigned:

"My gold-piece is gone!"

"Have you lost your money, my little man?" he asked, in a kindly way.

"Yes, sir; and it is all we have in the world."

"Ah! here is a hole in my pocket, and it has rolled out, for it was a three-dollar gold-piece."

"But maybe I can find it, sir," and the tears were in the boy's eyes.

"If you do not come back, I will trust you for your Thanksgiving dinner, for I know you will pay me when you can."

"Oh, thank you, sir! You are so kind!" and Will bounded away to look for his gold-piece.

But then he remembered that if he went at a rapid pace it might escape his eye; he walked slowly, searching the ground at every step of the way.

Presently he walked bolt up against a gentleman who had been watching his approach for half a block.

"Oh, pardon me, sir!" he said.

"Certainly, my boy; but you appear to be searching for something that you have lost?"

The face of the man was full of kindness, though stern, and his voice had a sympathy in it that touched the boy, who told his misfortune to the stranger, adding:

"It was all we had, sir, and poor mother's heart will break, I know."

The man looked like one who had seen the world, and he dressed as one who had a plethora pocket-book.

He was a reader of human nature, and saw that it was no begging for sympathy that the boy told his story for.

A man of fifty, perhaps, he was well preserved, and yet there was that in his face that seemed to indicate that his life had not been all made up of sunshine.

"My boy, I found your gold-piece, and—"

"Oh, sir!" cried Will, in delight.

"Yes, and I took it as an omen of good luck, this Thanksgiving day, and I meant to devote many times its amount to charity, of which I might not have thought but for my finding this gold-piece."

"No, I cannot give you my 'luck-piece,' as I must keep it; but I will give you more than its value, so let us go to the market and get the things you ordered, and then, if you will ask me home with you, I will go, for somehow I look upon you as a lucky find, my boy."

"Come, now, to the market."

"But, sir, our home is a flat on the top floor of a tenement-house, and it is so humble, and we are so poor, you would not like to go there."

"I will go, unless you refuse to take me, my boy."

"No sir, I could not refuse one who is so kind to me," was the answer, and Will led the way back to the market.

"Did you find your money, my lad?" asked the man.

"Yes, sir, or rather this gentleman found it for me."

"Yes, sir, and I wish you to put up your best turkey, and other things that I will order, and send at once to the address my young friend here will give you."

Will stood aghast, as he heard the orders, for flour, tea, coffee, sugar, hams and other things were on the list until he seemed to feel that his kind friend was going to provision the flat for a year to come.

"Now, Will, we must take a carriage, for I am a trifle lame, from the effects of an old wound when I was a soldier in the Mexican war," and a

passing hack was called, and the two entered it.

Arriving at the tenement-house the gentleman bade the driver wait, and then he followed Will up the dingy flights of stairs to the top floor.

Opening the door of the sitting-room Will ushered his guest in, and Mrs. Raymond arose from her easy-chair at sight of a stranger.

She looked pale and thin, but very beautiful, and her face slightly flushed as she saw her son with the visitor.

"This is my mother, Mr. Ivey, and this, my little sister Pearl."

"Mother, this gentleman has been most kind to me," and Will introduced his visitor with the ease of one double his years.

The visitor seemed amazed at the lovely woman he beheld before him, and instinctively he knew that he was in the presence of a lady.

He bowed low, and advancing held out his hand, while he said:

"You must pardon my intrusion, Mrs. Raymond; but I was so fortunate this morning as to find a three-dollar gold-piece."

"It caught my eye, as it glittered upon the pavement, and picking it up I saw that it had a hole in it, so attached it to my watch-chain."

"A moment after I beheld one I recognized as the owner coming in search of it, and thus I made the acquaintance of your noble boy, and hence took the occasion to also meet you and his sister."

Mrs. Raymond was touched by the words of the visitor, and there was that in his face that seemed to impress her, and she said:

"You are very welcome, sir, though ours is but a poor home to have a visitor come, and I have been an invalid for some little time; but may I ask, as my son introduced you as Mr. Ivey, if you are not Colonel Richard Ivey, who was known as Dashing Dick Ivey of the Dragoons in the Mexican war?"

"Why yes, madam, that was my name, when years ago I was a cavalry officer; but have we met before that you recognize me?"

"No, sir, but when a girl I kept a scrap-book, and yours was among the pictures that I took from a paper and put in it, and often have I looked over the book and your face has but little changed, so I recalled it upon hearing your name."

"You are very kind, my dear madam, and this is another link of friendship between us that you should remember me as a soldier, and I hope you will look upon me from this day as an old friend, one who knows your sufferings and your needs, for I have heard all from Will, and I intend to do for you just what I would have one do for a sister of mine were she in distress," and into the hearts of the mother and her children came a joy they had not known for many a long day, and all through Will Raymond's losing his three-dollar gold-piece on Thanksgiving Day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DASHING DRAGON.

COLONEL DICK IVEY was a bachelor and a man of vast wealth.

He had been an only son, and the idol of his boyhood life had been his sister, two years his junior.

Their parents had been wealthy, and they dated their ancestry back for many generations, and the father of the young Richard had been anxious to have his son become a soldier, and so got for him a cadetship at West Point.

A handsome, dashing youth, generous to a fault, Dick Ivey had won the hearts of professors and comrades alike, and none of the latter had envied him the first honors of his class when he had graduated, while the instructors had said they were well won and deserved.

There were four persons present at the graduating exercises that Dick was most desirous of pleasing, and these were his parents, his sister, and her best friend, the young cadet's lady-love.

But, in spite of his honors won, the fickle young lady-love had flirted with the honored cadet, refused his proffered love, and became infatuated, as it were, with a brother cadet of her old lover.

It cut Dick Ivey to the heart, but he nursed his sorrow in silence, uttered no complaint, and went to the border with his regiment, to soon win distinction as a daring officer.

The fickle maiden meanwhile married the successful rival, and two years after died, it was said, of a broken heart.

Then news came to Dick Ivey that his sister was to marry, and when he heard whom it was that was to be her husband, he obtained a furlough and started for his home to warn her

against the man who had broken the heart of his old lady-love.

But, wounded on the way, in a fight with Indians, he was laid up for weeks, and arrived too late, for his sister had married the man whom he now hated with all his soul.

Soon after the Mexican war broke out, and as the American army crossed the Rio Grande, Dick Ivey met his old rival, and learned of his sister's death.

Soon after a letter came to him, written by his sister, and given to some faithful servant to mail.

It told of her sorrows, her sufferings, the cruelties of the man she had loved, and that she too was dying of a broken heart.

At once did Dick Ivey seek the man who had wrecked the lives of two whom he had so dearly loved, and what he said was terse, to the point, and in deadly earnest. It was:

"You know my cause of quarrel with you, sir, and that now is no time to settle it, for we belong to our country."

"But, the day this war ends, if you and I are alive, you shall meet me on the field of honor, and but one of us shall ever leave it alive."

And all through the war did Dick Ivey win fame, and he became a hero in the eyes of his gallant comrades.

At last the war ended, the City of Mexico was in the hands of General Scott, and the Daring Dragoons, commanded by Colonel Ivey, were ordered home.

Instantly, he sought his rival, and reminded him of his words at the breaking out of hostilities, and the two met in personal combat upon the dueling field.

It was a duel with swords, and each man meant that it should be to the death, that no mercy should be shown, and it could end in but one way—the death of one, or both.

It was fought through to the bitter end, and Dick Ivey left his hated enemy dead upon the field.

Resigning his commission, he returned to his home in the State of Mississippi, and yet he remained there but a short while, for the spirit of unrest was upon him, and the papers teeming with stories of his career, he sailed for foreign lands and remained abroad for years.

Again, he returned to America and settled in an elegant bachelor-home upon a fashionable avenue in New York city, a man of noble impulses, yet one upon whose life a shadow had fallen, and who carried in his heart a skeleton of bitter memories.

Such was the man who had found Will Raymond's lost gold-piece, and his career, from a cadet at West Point, to his living a luxurious bachelor life in New York, Mrs. Raymond read to her children that Thanksgiving night after he had left, for the distinguished soldier had begged an invitation to eat his Thanksgiving turkey that day in the humble home of the woman he had so strangely met, and who, by some strange accident, had pasted in her scrap-book his picture, as a young soldier, and the scraps of his life history as she had then read them, never dreaming she would meet the hero with the dark, handsome face, dressed in his gorgeous Dragoon uniform.

To her children then, that Thanksgiving night after he had departed, Mrs. Raymond read the history of the Dashing Dragoon, and he became to Will and Pearl a hero also in their eyes, and warm was the welcome that he received when he came the next day to tell Mrs. Raymond that he had adopted all of them as *protéges*, and meant to take them to a pleasant home and send the children to school.

This promise he kept, for he would not be said nay, and Mrs. Raymond, grown almost happy-faced with the change, moved to a pleasant little home in the upper part of the city, and Will and Pearl daily attended the most fashionable schools in the metropolis.

Months thus passed away, Colonel Ivey taking his Sunday dinner with the mother and her children at first, and then calling oftener and oftener, until one night he called Will and Pearl to him and told them that he had asked their mother to become his wife, and that she had said that she would.

It made them happy, for they were glad to see joy in the face of their dearly loved mother, and soon after Mrs. Ruby Raymond became Mrs. Richard Ivey.

It was a quiet wedding in the cosey home, and then into the grand mansion of Colonel Ivey the mother and her children moved, and sunshine seemed to brighten all their pathway through life; but alas! who can see into the future, who can tell how far beyond the sunshine lie the

shadows that must fall upon our lives, shutting out all brightness, encircling them with gloom as black as the grave, and far more cruel.

CHAPTER IX.

PHANTOMS OF THE PAST.

It was a pleasant night and Mrs. Richard Ivey sat alone in the handsome library of her elegant country house on the sea-shore, for it was the summer time.

Her face had lost its look of haunting care, and her cheeks glowed with health, and she appeared to be happy once more.

Still there were phantoms of the past that would rise before her and they would not down at her bidding.

She recalled her first love, noble-hearted, honest Kent Lomax, from whom she had fled to become the wife of a man who had proven himself a wretch, a villain.

She recalled her happy home, her loving parents, and wondered if they had ever forgiven her, for she had not heard one word from them since her flight, and she knew not the scene that had followed, when Kent Lomax had met Schuyler Cluett upon the field of honor, and had fallen before the bullet of the man she had married.

She had told Colonel Ivey all before she had married him, and he had but loved her the more for her confession and the sorrows she had known.

He had told her, too, that in the pleasant fall of the year, they would all go down to Maryland on a visit, and see the old home and her parents, and ask that she might be forgiven.

As she sat alone in her home she was pondering over the past.

Her husband had gone off on a business trip to the far West, Will was away upon a yachting cruise, for he had become a skillful and devoted yachtsman, his step-father having presented him with a beautiful craft, and Pearl was spending the night with a little playmate who lived near.

Presently a footfall was heard in the hallway, and Mrs. Ivey supposed it was the butler, about to close up the house for the night, so that it did not disturb her, but she started when the words fell upon her ears:

"Mrs. Ivey, I believe?"

"Oh, God!"

The cry came like a groan of anguish from the lips of the woman, as she turned and beheld the form of a man standing before her.

He had entered the mansion unseen, had walked into the library unannounced, and was within a few paces of her.

His appearance was that of a gentleman, and yet one whose life was a fast one.

He was well dressed, in fact almost flashily attired, wore a diamond in his shirt front, another upon the little finger of his left hand, and a heavy watch chain crossed his vest front.

He appeared to be a man of forty, and his face was handsome, his eyes piercing, yet a certain cold look, added to recklessness and a cynical smile were not prepossessing.

"You had not expected to see me again, Ruby?" he said in a voice that was tinged with a sneer.

"I believed you dead," she whispered, for she seemed scarcely able to articulate.

"Yes, for so I sent you word."

"You sent me word," she said, repeating his words.

"Yes, I got a pal of mine to come and see you, and tell you how I had been smashed up in a railway accident."

"The smash-up was true, and I had my leg broken, and lay for weeks in agony; but I got well, and here I am."

"Oh why did you do me this cruel wrong?" she groaned.

"To accomplish just what you have done?"

"And that is—"

"That, believing me dead you might marry, for I knew your beauty would turn the head of some old millionaire fool as it has done."

"And this was your plot?"

"Certainly," and he took a seat near her.

"What is your purpose?" she asked in a voice hardly audible.

"Not to claim my wife, I assure you."

"I would die before I would again live with you; but it breaks my heart to feel that I have committed this crime against the noble man that made me, as he supposed, his wife, for we both felt that you were dead."

"And wished me so?" he said with a sneer.

"Indeed I did, though God forgive me for telling the truth."

"Well, you see I am by no means a dead man, and, as I have no desire to die of starvation I have come to you."

"To me?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"You are rich."

"I am worth nothing, only such as my husband gives me."

"Well, you'll have to strike him for a loan on my account."

"What do you mean?"

"I need money."

"I cannot help you."

"You must."

"I will not."

"Listen to me, Ruby, and don't be silly."

"You have broken the laws of the land, in marrying Colonel Ivey when you had a husband living."

"I believed you dead."

"That does not excuse you, and besides, I can bring up witnesses to swear that you knew me to be alive!"

"Oh, monster!"

"I can do it, and that will prove your guilt, so you see, you are wholly in my power."

"What do you wish of me?"

"I wish, as I said, some money, and I will give you a reasonable time to get it for me."

"If I get it I will go far away and never appear again to disturb you; but, if I do not receive it, I will simply make my presence known to your husband and destroy you."

"It will but drive me again into poverty and wretchedness, for I will not live a lie to that good man, and shall tell him all."

"You are a fool, Ruby."

"I was a fool when I became your wife."

"I did not love you, though I believed that I did, and I soon found out that it was but a fascination, such as a serpent has over a bird."

"I fled from my happy home, I deserted a true, honorable man, and became your wife, not to be acknowledged as such, for you hid me away in a little village, while you led a life of dissipation in Philadelphia, still believed to be a bachelor by your friends."

"In that lonely life I lived, and my children were born, and, with no friend near, mine was a wretched existence."

"Deserted by you, with my children, I went to New York to earn my living, and thither you followed me, and I had to give you all that I had saved up, and you gambled it away."

"Again deserted by you, I sought to hide away where you could not find me, and I became prosperous, in a small way, by selling the work of my hands; but again you found me, took my little earnings and went West, and soon after I heard of your death."

"Believe me, Schuyler Cluett, wicked as it was, I rejoiced that I was free, for I believed that I was."

"And now you come again, when I felt that life was not all shadow, and you demand that I rob my husband to help you."

"I am your husband, Ruby, and I need help, and shall have it."

"Not from me, sir."

"Yes, from you."

"I say no!—for I will tell all, and defy you."

"I will first see him, tell him who I am, and he will pay me to keep quiet, for the man loves you."

"For the sake of yourself, and of your children, you had best decide to give me the money I ask."

She was silent, and lost in deep thought for full a minute, while he watched her face narrowly.

At last she said:

"Schuyler Cluett, you know that I would give much to have you never cross my path again; but your coming has unnerved me, and I am not myself."

"If I give you money, without telling my husband all, it would but be robbing him to pay you."

"If I tell him, I believe he would pay you as you demand; but yet, with you alive, and he knowing it, I could not remain here as his wife."

"So go from me, and I will decide when I can collect my thoughts."

"I will give you just one week."

"It is long enough, for I will not need so much time; but do not come here."

"No, I will give you an address in the city that will reach me, and you can appoint a place of meeting when you can give me the money."

"If I decide to do so."

"Oh, no fear about that, for you will decide in your favor, and for your children, for it would be a big scandal, you know, to come out; that—but I'll not remind you, so here is my address, and I'll bid you good-night, Mrs. Ivey," and he left the room as silently as he had entered it, and the poor woman was again alone with the phantoms of the past.

CHAPTER X.

DESERTED.

COLONEL RICHARD IVEY came back to his elegant home, from his trip to the West.

He had telegraphed to have the carriage meet him at the railway station, but to his surprise it was not there, and so he sprung into a village hack and drove homeward.

It was dark ere he reached the mansion and his surprise was greater when he saw no lights to greet him.

"Why Ruby must have gone up to the city; but she wrote nothing of intending to do so, in her last letter," he said, as he sprung out of the vehicle and paid the driver.

Ascending to the piazza he rung the bell, and soon a light flashed within the hallway, and the butler opened the door.

"Well, Richard, what is the matter, that I receive such a bleak welcome?" he said.

"The madam is away, sir, and has been for some days; but she left a letter for you, sir, and it's on your table with the mail."

"I'll have lights, sir, at once."

The mansion was soon lighted up, and supper ordered for the master, who went into his library and took up the numerous letters that had arrived for him during his absence of several weeks.

All were thrown aside excepting one.

That one bore no stamp or post-mark, and was from his wife.

Hastily he broke the seal, and seeing that it was several pages in length, he threw himself into his easy-chair beneath the lamp.

As he read, he uttered a sound very like a moan, and, strong man though he was, his hands trembled as he held the letter.

When he had finished he slowly re-read it, and then bending his head upon his hands he sat thus, the picture of silent, manly grief.

What he read was as follows:

"SOLDIER'S REST, {

"September 1st, 18—." }

"Dare I, in this letter that I now write you, address you as my heart would dictate and call you my own dear Richard?—for such you are to me, and ever will be, though a cruel blow causes me to fly from you."

"The other night I sat alone in your library in your pet chair."

"Will was away in his yacht, on a cruise for a few days, and Pearl was spending the night with a little girl friend."

"Suddenly a visitor entered the library."

"To my horror, it was one I deemed dead, years ago!"

"But no not dead, alas! but alive, cynical, sneering, cold-hearted, cruel, he stood before me."

"Dressed well, wearing diamonds, yet a beggar for gold."

"Need I tell you that it was my husband?"

"Need I tell you that he had deceived me in his death, and told me that he had purposely done so, that I might, by my beauty—such were his words—win a rich husband and then he could force from me gold to keep my secret?"

"Such was his mission to me, and he demanded a large sum that he might dissipate it in his luxurious life."

"He promised to go from me and never return did I give him the sum he demanded."

"Did I refuse, he said that he would go to you, and you, for honor's sake, to save scandal, would buy him off."

"Again, he said he would tell you that I knew he was alive and yet married you."

"So, in my grief, I begged him to give me time for thought, though I then knew what my course would be."

"He gave me a week to consider, and, confident that I would yield, he left."

"He judged me by his own guilty heart and felt safe in his threats to divulge the secret of his being still alive."

"When he was gone I fell in a swoon upon the floor, and there Richards found me when he came to put out the lights."

"The maid revived me, and I passed a night of bitter agony; but I was decided as to what I should do, and I told the servants that I had heard bad news, and must go away, perhaps to be gone a long time."

"I did not care to say more, that I would never return, for your sake."

"Then I began to get ready, and that day Pearl returned home."

"The next day Will came back from his cruise and I told my children that we must go."

"I told them that it was no quarrel, no wrong of one of us against the other, only duty forced me away."

"I had in my purse something over a hundred dollars, which you had given me for charity, you remember, and I devoted it to charity to myself, for we go as poor as we came to you otherwise, and it is because I would not feel right in taking from you one dollar when I know that man lives."

"To-morrow we leave for New York in the early train, and I shall go to your city mansion and get our old traps there, and place in the Safe Deposit the jewelry and other valuables you have given to us."

"There is one souvenir I keep, the ring you and I supposed to be *our wedding ring*.

"That I shall wear, though the lie stares me in the face; but it was placed there in honor in so doing.

"Where I go, you will not know, for I shall not wish you to find me, which your heart, I feel, will tempt you to do.

"I go my way as before, to earn our bread by my handiwork, and I am strong now and in good health, after the happiness that has come into my life, and I can bear much.

"God bless you, will be my prayer, and the prayer of my children, Richard, for you have been to us all in all, and to give you up is a pang that cuts deep into the hearts of us all.

"Farewell, Richard, and ever believe in the love, though it be in shackles, of

"Yours unhappily,

"RUBY CLUETT."

Such was the letter that Colonel Dick Ivey read, and it was no wonder that he felt deeply the blow that had fallen upon him.

For a long time he remained in silent grief; and then he raised his bowed head, and already suffering had made his stern, handsome face haggard.

"She is as pure as an angel, and she shall not leave me.

"I will find her, cost what it may, and tomorrow I will go to the city, and set the wheels of the Secret Service in motion to find her and her children.

"Then she shall get a divorce from this wretch, for, innocent thing that she is, she does not know that she can readily do so, under the plea of desertion.

"If not, why, I'll have to make a widow of her and then marry her;" and the face of the colonel proved that he meant what he said, while, after a moment, he added:

"It strikes me that a man who has been such a wretch as this fellow is, has done that which would place him behind prison bars, and perhaps stretch his neck, so I'll put the detectives upon his track, and see what they can discover of his past career;" and with this determination Colonel Ivey sought the supper room, now cheered with the thought that his separation from those he loved was but temporary.

CHAPTER XI.

A REBUFF.

SCHUYLER CLUETT waited patiently for the time allowed his wife, in which to write to him, to pass, and no letter came.

What could it mean? Had she lost his address? Did she intend to defy him?

These questions chased each other through his mind over and over again, and he could find no answer.

But he waited another day beyond the allotted time, and then determined to solve the mystery.

To do this he would go to the house of Colonel Ivey.

He first sought the residence of the colonel in the city, and found it closed up.

This proved that the family had not returned to town.

So he started for the country, and in due time reached the station near Soldier's Rest, as the home of the colonel was called.

He took a hack and started for the villa, leaving the vehicle at the gate, while he advanced on foot, having told the driver to wait for him.

It was a lordly place, a grand mansion, surrounded by spacious, ornamental grounds on one side, flower gardens in the rear, a lawn in the front, and a park upon the other side.

The grounds sloped down to the walk, and there were pleasure boats to invite to a sail or a row.

The view from the piazzas was beautiful in the extreme, and altogether a more charming country home could not be found than was Soldier's Rest.

"A place for a gentleman of my taste to live, this," said Schuyler Cluett, as he walked up the grand path to the mansion.

"By Jove! a bright idea strikes me, and I hope I am not too late to carry it out.

"Let me see: if I should keep in the background, that is, out of sight, and get rid of this gallant colonel, that is, let him meet with some accident to cause his death, why my wife would be his heiress, of course.

"Then I could come in, and after half a year's mourning I could force her to marry me, for appearances' sake, and I'd have all.

"I was a trifle too fast in appearing as I did, and not thinking of this little game before.

"Now it may be too late, for she may have told the colonel about me, as she has not appeared, and he may simply back her up in getting a divorce from me, which she can do.

"Well, here I am, and *there he is*.

"Now I must put a bold face upon the matter and survey the fort to see if I can take it."

He had gotten himself up in his best style, and Colonel Ivey, seeing a well-dressed stranger approaching, arose to meet him.

The colonel had that noon returned from the city, where he could find no clew to the whereabouts of Ruby and her children; but he had set the best detectives on the track and was hopeful of soon discovering them.

Bowing to the visitor, the colonel advanced to meet him.

Schuyler Cluett bowed politely and asked:

"Is this the home of Colonel Ivey?"

"It is, sir, and I am Richard Ivey, at your service.

"Be seated, pray, or will you enter the house?"

"Thank you, sir; my name is Cluett, sir, and I am an old friend of your wife, and have called to see her, being in the neighborhood."

"Indeed, sir; I am really glad to meet you, Mr. Cluett, so be seated, pray, for it is pleasanter here than indoors."

Schuyler Cluett sat down. But he hardly knew what to say.

It seemed evident, from the colonel's manner, he thought, that his wife had kept her secret, for he did not appear to be known.

"I hope Mrs. Ivey is well, sir?" he volunteered.

"Well, sir, as to that I cannot just say, as she is not at home; but I hope so."

"Indeed! She is absent then?"

"Yes, sir, she has gone far away, she and her children, and, as you are an old friend of hers, I do not mind telling you that it is on account of a grand scam whom she once married."

"No!"

"Yes, Mr. Cluett; she was infatuated in her girlhood by some wretch whom she ran off with and married, and soon found him out to be a worthless vagabond, a gambler and all that was bad.

"He robbed her, deserted her, and sent her word, through a confederate in guilt, that he had been killed, and so believing him to be dead, she married me.

"But he turned up during my absence West, tried to get her to rob me, to buy him off from telling the secret of his still being alive, and she, too noble to do so, fled from my home, from me, and has gone far away, while I am left alone."

"But you can find her, sir?" eagerly asked Cluett.

"Yes, I hope to do so, for, I'll tell you a secret."

"Yes, Colonel Ivey."

"I have the detectives at work, tracking down this rascally husband, and I have found out enough about him already, to give her a divorce, by sending him to State's Prison."

"Oh, sir, can you do this?" and Schuyler Cluett turned deadly pale.

"Oh yes, I hope to; and more, for I don't mind telling you, my dear Mr. Cluett, as you are my wife's friend, but you must keep the secret, that there was a mysterious murder some time ago, for the murderer cannot be found.

"But this husband—I do wish I could recall his name—"

"Raymond, sir."

"Yes, Raymond, that's the name, thank you.

"Well, he was in the vicinity when this murder was committed, and I think men can be bribed to swear that he was guilty, you know, and I'll give a fortune to buy a jury up, so that he can be hanged, and—but why do you rise, sir, for surely you are not going?" and the colonel looked up with surprise, as Cluett arose as though to depart.

"Yes, sir, I must go, for I just recall an important case I have to try, as I am a lawyer, colonel, and your story of your wife's former husband recalled it to my memory."

"But you will remain my guest, sir, for the night at least, and I'll go up to the city with you in the morning, as I will have this rascal arrested at once, and I think the law will make short work of him."

"It should, sir, it should, and I have no doubt it will; but good-by, Colonel Ivey, good-by, sir," and Schuyler Cluett hastened away from the mansion, reached his waiting hack, and taking out his watch said:

"Driver, you have just twenty minutes to catch the Express up to the city, and if you do it I'll give you a ten-dollar bill extra."

"I'll do it, sir," replied the driver, and the horses were sent along the highway at a pace that surprised them, as their usual gait was a jog.

And looking after the rapidly disappearing

vehicle, Colonel Ivey muttered to himself, as his face wore a grim smile:

"Well, I think I frightened him so that he'll hunt a hiding-place in the far West, and I only wish I did know that he was deserving of the penitentiary; but I'll telegraph the detective chief to have men at the depot to meet him and see just where he goes, and what he does, so as to be prepared for him should he remain in New York," and entering his library Colonel Ivey wrote a long dispatch to the chief of the detective service, telling him to have men on the watch for Schuyler Cluett, giving a full description of the man, and by what train to expect him.

This message was then sent post-haste to the station-agent to rush through with all dispatch, and Colonel Ivey felt relieved at having, as he believed, gotten rid of Ruby's rascally husband, from whom she could now easily get a divorce, under the plea of desertion and non-support for years.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOY CAPTIVE.

LET me beg the kind reader, who has followed me through my story thus far, to recall an important personage who was left a prisoner, in the hands of a band of wicked men who were evidently hiding from the officers of the law.

In that boy captive the reader has doubtless recognized Will Raymond, for his mother had not taught him the name of his father, Schuyler Cluett.

When he had been addressed to on the street by a gentleman, and sent on an important mission, he had been entrapped, for his face and age just suited a purpose that was to be carried out through him.

What that purpose was will soon be made known.

The time of Will's capture was some months after the flight of the mother with her children from the elegant country mansion of Colonel Richard Ivey.

So well had Mrs. Raymond, as I must now again call her, concealed herself, that the police and detectives, put upon her track by Colonel Ivey, had been unable to find her whereabouts, and it was believed that she had left New York for another place.

In an humble home, in a cheap quarter of the city, the poor woman had found an abiding-place, for it could not be called a home.

The rooms were but three in number, and not so pleasant as those where she had lived in poverty before; but they were kept scrupulously clean, and were not uncomfortable.

As soon as she was fully settled, Mrs. Raymond paid her rent for six months in advance; then she laid in a store of provisions, and purchasing painting materials, again began to paint little pictures for sale, for she had but a small sum left of that which she had brought with her, and she must begin to earn more, she knew.

But the shock of her husband's return, as though from the grave, had been a severe one, and she felt that she was by no means a well woman.

Gradually her nerves failed her, the main-springs of life, and she became almost a confirmed invalid, unable to do but little.

Will and Pearl had again begun attending the nearest public school, but, as the spring drew near and Mrs. Raymond's health failed her more and more, her little daughter had remained at home with her, while her brave boy had given up his studies to earn what money he could, and this was but little, hardly enough to give them food, and, but for Mrs. Raymond having paid the rent, it would not have been sufficient to meet all demands, moderate as they were.

It was while Will was skirmishing around in search of a stray penny to earn, that he had struck what had appeared to him a "bonanza," in the promise of a couple of dollars for delivering a letter and keeping his mouth shut, at the same time afflicting himself with loss of memory, as the one who paid him for his alleged services had demanded that he should.

When, therefore, Will found himself a prisoner, the reader can well imagine his feelings.

Brave boy that he was, his first thought was of his sick mother's distress at his absence, and his second of himself.

It flashed upon him, from the words of Jerry, the Night Hawk, the secret manner of his gaining admission, the letter which had led him into a trap, that he was meant for some mysterious purpose of villainy.

The room in which he found himself had but one door, that by which he had entered, and the ceiling ran up with the peaked roof, in which were skylights for light and air.

It was a large room, occupying one side of the house, excepting where the little ante-chamber, or hallway was taken off, and about the sides were berths such as one sees in a steamboat's cabin.

A cupboard was in one end of the room, filled with dishes, and next to it was a dumb-waiter that came up from the lower depths somewhere.

On the opposite side a door was opened to what appeared to be another cupboard, but in which Will saw at a glance a ladder, leading to an open skylight above.

In the center of the room was a large table with chairs about it, and seated in various attitudes about it were a dozen men, who scowled viciously upon the boy as he was dragged into their presence by Jerry, the Night Hawk.

But Will, in spite of his perilous position, kept up a brave manner.

"What did that kid come here for?" asked a man with a scowling face.

"Captain Cruel sent him, and writes that he'll do for the little job to play on the Philadelphia man whose son died on our hands, and thus cut us out of the reward," said Night Hawk Jerry, who seemed to be a leader of the band of ruffians.

"He looks it sart'in, and I thought it were Billy come ter life ag'in when I seen his face; but will he do it?"

"He'll have to, Jack, or—" and the look and action of Night Hawk Jerry were most significant, and did not escape the eyes of Will Raymond.

CHAPTER XIII.

PUT TO THE TEST.

BEFORE more could be said by any of the band, a bell rung over in the dumb-waiter, and two men at once stepped to the cupboard and began to place dishes upon the table, preparatory to having supper.

Will was told to sit down on a chair, and the coming meal, rather than the boy prisoner, seemed to occupy the thoughts of the rude gathering.

By the time that the table was set, with a plate, knife, fork, teacup and spoon for each, and a dish of butter and large bowl of sugar in the center, a second ring came at the dumb-waiter, and up from the depths below appeared the supper.

The two men, whose duty it seemed, put the supper on the table, and it was by no means a repast to be refused, for there was hot coffee, milk, hot biscuit, steak, potatoes and preserves.

Will was told to "Take a seat youngster, and pitch in, for you don't know how soon yer rations will be cut short."

He had eaten but a light breakfast, and nothing since, so he obeyed the injunction with a gusto, winning the admiration of the men at his pluck in not losing his appetite when his fate hung so in the balance of uncertainty.

But Will had made up his mind that though he was in a tight place, he would not despair, but find some way to get out, and the means of doing so did not worry him until the time came for action.

He had intelligence, strength and pluck beyond his years, and the ups and downs of life had taught him much, while he was a good reader of human nature, and, living amid the slums of the city, he knew a great deal of its wretchedness, its sins and its people, good and bad.

He had read the papers, and he knew that almost under the eyes of the police there were bands of evil men who would rob and kill without mercy to gain gold.

That he had fallen into the hands of some such wicked men he did not doubt; but he did not despair of working out his own salvation in some way, when he was assured just what their game was that they intended to win by playing him as a trump card.

So Will ate his supper with apparent relish, and rising, thanked them politely and resumed his former seat.

"You've been well raised, boy," said Jerry. "Yes, sir; I have a good mother, and she is sick now, and will be anxious about me—so please tell me if I have to stay here long."

"That depends, lad."

"Upon what?"

"What is your name?"

"Will Raymond, sir," said the boy, returning to his old name, for while with the colonel he had taken that of Ivey, at his request.

"What do you do?"

"Anything I can earn money at to support my sick mother and little sister."

"You've seen better days, I guess?"

"Yes, sir; we have not always been so poor."

"Well, how would you like to become a rich man's son?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"The captain sent you here because you resembled somebody, didn't he?"

"He gave me a letter to bring to you, and said you would give me two dollars for doing the errand."

"Well, that was a bait to get you here; but, if you do as I say, you'll do better by far than make two dollars."

"What must I do?"

"Do you see this photograph?" and he held up a picture before Will of a small boy, perhaps seven years of age.

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Nearly fourteen."

"Well, this photograph was intended for you."

"Oh, no, sir."

"Boy, you asked me what you must do, and I am going to tell you."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't interrupt me."

"No, sir."

"This photograph looks just as you did six years ago, and then your name was Willie Rossmore."

"Your home was in Baltimore, or rather near it, and these are photographs of the place, and a handsome one it was."

"Here is the house, here pictures of the grounds, all taken by an itinerant photographer."

"You had them in your house at the time you were kidnapped, for you must remember that you were stolen when you were a little boy."

"You went out in the grounds, just here, running away from your nurse, and two men, passing along the highway in a buggy, took you with them."

"They carried you far away, treated you well, and took you to a farm in the West, where one day I found you, and you told me your story and I immediately recognized you as a boy stolen years ago, and whose photograph I had often seen published in the papers."

"Your father, Mr. Rossmore, is a very, very rich man, and he has offered fifty thousand dollars for your return, and I will get it, while you will be raised in luxury, and, being an only child, you will inherit all of your father's fortune."

"Now, my boy, I wish you to study these photographs of your old home, and here is the name of the servants who were at the house then, and your nurse was an old colored woman, Auntie Peggy."

"Then you had a pony named Nip, and a dog, a large Newfoundland, that bore the name of Zip."

"These are the clothes you had on when you were stolen; they are ragged now, for you wore them a long time, and when you got others you kept these."

"You had this ring on your forefinger then, but you can wear it now on your left hand little finger—see, it just fits."

"What has become of the real little boy that was stolen?" asked Will, quietly.

The men all exchanged peculiar glances with each other, and one said:

"Tell him, Jerry, so that he'll know we won't stand any nonsense."

"Well, he would not behave as we wished him to, and he would remember too much, and so we dared not take him back to get the reward, you see."

"And is he dead?"

"You've hit it, he is, for one day he left our camp, as we were crossing the prairie in Nebraska, not very many miles from Fort McPherson, and we found him lying under a solitary tree, mighty near dead from starvation; and he died, and we buried him there, cutting his name into the tree, as a monument, as any emigrant folks would who had lost a young one."

"Poor little fellow, he had better have done as you wished, and so been able to get home."

"Boy, you've got wisdom above your years, and you'll play our little game for us with a handful of trumps and a card or two up your sleeve, I can tell you."

"I guess you've been nipped by hunger, and wish a soft thing of it for life, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you'll talk our way, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; only it will be very sad for my poor mother and sister to lose me."

"No, for you can write them that you had a chance to go West, and I'll take the letter and some money to them, and you bet we'll keep them from want and send them lots of things, while if you don't like it where you go, you can

just skip out after you've got together a nice little sum of money, for we don't care so long as we get the reward for your return, and you shall have five thousand of that, for I'll keep you posted where we are, and you can have the money any time you call for it."

"This looks fair, sir; but I hate to leave my mother and little sister, though I do want to make money."

"Well, you write your mother a letter, and I'll see that she gets it to-morrow, and I'll put a cool fifty in it for her, too."

"Now, write your letter, and then study over those photographs, this list of names, and the lesson I have here for you," and Jerry handed Will various slips of paper.

"Now, lad," he continued, "if you play this game right, you'll get all I say; but if you play us false, you'll be knifed sure, so just bear that in mind."

"I don't wish to die, and I'd rather be rich than poor, if I can take care of my mother and sister, and they don't find out I am deceiving them."

"They'll never know it, lad, and it was a lucky find the captain made in you, for you look just what we want, and have got the sense to play the game through."

"I tell you, though, we had a time with Willie Rossmore, up to his death three years ago, for we had to travel about with him, hide him, watch him, and were going to take him to an Indian camp to live for a year or so to make him forget, when he ran off and died on the prairie."

"But you look like him exactly, though you are older by a year or so, but that don't make any difference."

"Now there's a pen and ink, and here's your lesson to study, while we play a game of cards."

Will sat down at a shelf that served as a desk, and began to "study his lesson," as Night Hawk Jerry had called it.

He wrote a letter to his mother, and at last the men began to turn in, each one going to his bunk, while the boy was also given one, and crawling into the berth, appeared to be sound asleep, while the last man retiring put out the lamp, and only the light from the stars, twinkling through the skylights, pervaded the large room, and the sonorous breathing of the sleepers soon showed that, guilty beings though they were, no twinges of conscience kept them awake.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL PLAYS HIS LITTLE GAME.

LYING in his little bunk, which was an upper one, Will Raymond did not go to sleep.

He saw the men drop off one by one, from their card playing, he watched the last one up draw on the ropes, to raise the skylights and let in more air, and, as he came to the one near him, he feared he was going to see if he was asleep, so he closed his eyes and breathed hard.

But the man drew on the rope, that raised the skylight, some ten feet above Will's head, and then putting out the lamp he went to bed.

Still gazing upward Will saw the stars fade from view, and the skylights rattled, showing that the clouds had obscured the sky and a wind was springing up.

Until all seemed to be asleep, Will lay quiet as a mouse; then he bent over the edge of his bunk and looked about him.

He had left his shoes on the floor, and hung his jacket upon a chair, but otherwise he was dressed.

Then too he had placed a bundle in his bunk, before he got in himself, and this he tied with a twine string about his waist.

Raising himself then to a kneeling posture, he saw that the ladder, before referred to as going up to a skylight, was right by the foot of his berth.

Softly he arose, grasped one of the rounds and drew himself up.

Without the slightest sound he ascended the ladder, crept up through the skylight and found himself upon the peak of the high roof.

He well knew his danger, that if he was discovered, the band would kill him, as he believed Willie Rossmore had been killed, instead of having died by starvation and exposure.

Standing up he glanced about him, and his eye fell upon nothing but roofs.

He saw that the building on which he stood ran back some distance from the street, was very high, narrow, and ended fifty feet away in a large chimney.

On each side of the sharp roof were slats, a foot from the top, evidently placed there to

serve as footguards in a walk toward the chimney.

The clouds, black as night, were now flying low, and skurrying along before an approaching storm.

The lightning came in vivid flashes, and it was enough to appall the heart of a seaman, there on that high perch, where the slightest misstep would hurl him to death, the tremor of a nerve would dash him to his doom.

But there was death behind him, sure, and a struggle against death before him, with chances of the boy's triumph, so he held on in his determination to escape.

He knew that the men had placed those slats along the roof for some purpose, and that there was a way to escape from the roof he did not doubt, so he determined to find it.

With the bundle at his back, tied with a string about his waist, bare-headed, bare-footed, jacketless, the brave boy stood on the dangerous perch, to return to the outlaw band certain death, to advance a chance for life, while the lightning fairly blinded him, with its vividness.

Step by step the boy advanced toward the chimney, for he dared not tarry there long, as any moment the storm might awaken the Land Sharks, as Will had heard she band speak of themselves, and, if missed, he would be pursued and taken.

But he had arranged his bedding so as to look like a form in his berth, and placed his jacket, shoes and hat so as to be seen, if he was suspected, which he did not believe.

As he took the first step the rain began to descend in torrents, and a sound behind him caused him to turn his head quickly.

He saw that the skylights were being lowered by some one in the room and he breathed more freely as he felt that he had not been discovered.

But the driving rain into his face, blinded him, as he had no hat to shelter his eyes, and the slats and roof being wet, rendered his position far more perilous.

But on he went, step by step, until he reached the chimney.

It was breast high to him, and he noticed that it was very large.

From there down to the ground was a long way, and he saw no means of descending.

Perhaps upon the other side there was a ladder, he thought, and again it came to his mind that the men might have a rope ladder to bring with them.

If this was the case he was doomed, and, the thought in spite of the driving cold rain made him break out into a dense perspiration.

Leaping upon the chimney, for his experience as an amateur sailor had helped him, and he had often gone on board ships at the wharf and ascended to the highest point he could reach, he gazed over the side of the brickwork to see if there was aught to aid his descent.

But he saw that the roof was even with the chimney, so no ladder could go down it.

"They must hook a rope-ladder into the chimney in some way," he muttered, and he ran his hand around inside to find the hook, determined to tear his clothing in strips and make a rope, but what he would escape.

"Ah!" he said, as his hand touched a piece of iron.

"A ladder inside," he cried, joyously, as he felt rods of iron going down as far as he could reach.

Instantly he lowered himself into the chimney and commenced the descent.

Feeling with his feet he found the rods, two feet apart, and down he went into the gloom.

One thing was certain, the chimney was not used as a smoke-conductor, for there was no soot in it.

Down, down he went into the darkness, only a shadowy light showing the opening in the top of the chimney.

He had counted twenty rods, and so knew that he must have descended some forty feet.

Then his feet touched bottom, and turning, he saw the glimmer of a light through a crack.

Stooping, he gazed through the crack and looked out into a room dimly lighted, the gas being turned down low.

He saw that a fire-board hid the open chimney in which he stood, and moving it out he beheld the interior of the room distinctly.

There were two windows, one on either side of the fire-place, and he heard the wind rattling the sashes furiously, and the rain pattering viciously against the panes of glass.

There was a stove before him, but it was evidently there for show, as the smoke-stack entered the chimney, yet no soot was in it, which

proved that a fire could not have been lighted in it.

A table with books on it, some pictures on the walls, a clothes-press, and over on one side of a door was a bed, while horrors! *there was a man in it.*

The occupant of the bed was asleep, that was certain, his face turned toward the wall, as Will could see by the dimly-burning gas-jet over the table.

To escape, the boy saw that his only chance was to get out of his hiding-place, cross the room, unlock the door, and thus get out; but when out of the room would he be free?

This was the startling question he asked himself, as he grasped the fireboard to push it one side, determined to at once make the venture, for he did not know at what moment he might find a pursuer coming down the chimney on his track.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOY GUIDE.

THE reader can fully appreciate the peril of Will when they know what was behind him, and that he had a room, unknown to him, and with an occupant asleep in it, to cross, before he got out, while he little knew where the door would lead him, or whether he would be any nearer escape than where he then was.

Cautiously he raised the fireboard from within and began to move it outward as though it swung on a hinge.

He did this noiselessly, and soon had space enough to get through.

This he did and rose to a standing posture, the little bundle still at his back.

Then he put the fireboard back in its place and stepped forward.

The floor creaked and startled him, and he walked quickly to the door.

As he reached it the sleeper started, turned in bed, raised his head and glanced toward the window, while he muttered:

"What a deuce of a storm is raging."

Then back dropped his head, and he did not see the boy crouching down within two feet of him, and who held, grasped firmly and ready for use, a boot-jack, that his hand accidentally touched.

Had the man attempted to get out of bed, or had he glanced toward the boy, he would have felt the weight of the boot-jack, for Will was determined to escape at all hazards, even if he had to strike at human life, for he did not doubt, coming to this room as he had from the den of the Land Sharks, that the occupant was one of the band.

But, fortunately for the man he dropped off to sleep again, and fortunately, too, for Will, who might have made a miss blow and then been killed or captured.

As soon as the heavy breathing of the man indicated that he was once more asleep, Will turned to the door and placed his hand upon the key.

He turned it slowly in the lock, and yet it creaked loudly to his ears; but the noise of the storm without drowned the sound as far as waking the sleeper was concerned.

Taking hold of the knob he drew back the latch, and moved the door.

It creaked loudly, so he shut it to quickly as he saw the man move uneasily.

He kept still, and the man once more breathed naturally in his slumber.

Drawing the key from the door Will then opened it quickly and stepped outside, closed it after him, though trembling at the loud creaking sound it made.

At the same time he thrust the key in the door and turned it, just as he heard the man spring out of bed.

Where he was he did not know, for all was blackness about him, but he at once moved away from the door, feeling his way cautiously, while he could hear the occupant of the room moving hastily about, and then grasp the knob of the door.

A smothered curse followed the words:

"The key is gone!"

Then there was a shaking of the door, and Will nearly fell down a flight of stairs; but caught himself on the rail.

As he hastily descended there appeared a crescent-shaped light before him, and he knew that it was over a door, and a moment after he reached it.

It was locked, but the key was on the inside and hastily he turned it, and he could hardly restrain a shout of joy as he found himself out in the street.

The storm was at its height, the rain was pouring in torrents and the narrow street was

flooded; but the daring boy cared little for that and turning noted the house and number.

Then he darted away, unmindful of the rain.

At the corner he saw the name of the street, and once more pressed on, seemingly acquainted with the locality and aiming for a certain point.

Not even a policeman was seen out in that driving rain, so the boy met no human being as he ran along up to his ankles in water.

Here and there a light burned dimly, evidently in some sick-room, and all else was darkness, excepting the flickering street lamps on the corners.

Turning into another street he came in sight of a colored lamp, jutting out from a large brick house.

Toward this he ran and a moment after, dripping wet, bare-headed, shoeless and jacketless he darted into a room where sat several officers in police uniform, while one wearing the badge of a captain of the force sat behind a desk in a small adjoining room.

The boy appeared like an apparition to the officers, but he gave them no time for thought, as he said:

"Is not that Sergeant Daly?" and he pointed to the officer in the other room.

"Yes, it is Captain Daly, for he's been promoted," answered an officer.

"Ho, Murphy, any one to see me?" called out the captain.

"Yes, sir, a boy that looks as if he'd just swum across East river," was the reply.

"Ah! I know that face, you are Will Raymond, who captured the convict for me over a year ago," said Captain Daly coming out.

"Yes, sir, and I've come to tell you a strange story, and guide you to the den of a band of outlaws that call themselves Land Sharks for I just escaped from them," and Will spoke quickly, though with not a particle of excitement in his manner and voice, so well did he control his feelings.

The name of Land Sharks caused the police present to gather near at once and appear deeply interested, while Captain Daly said:

"If you know the hiding-place of that gang, my lad, you know more than any policeman or detective in New York has been able to find out."

"I do know it, sir, and two ways of getting there; but what you do, you must do now, as they will escape, so I'll tell you all I can while you get your men ready, and there are over a dozen in the band."

"Murphy, call up twenty men and a sergeant at once."

"Now, Master Will, for you see I have not forgotten your name, let me have your story."

In as few words as possible, Will told of his having been stopped by a well-dressed stranger and then sent to the den of the Land Sharks, as an excuse to get him into their clutches.

His manner of getting there, and his reception he made known, together with his acquiescence, as the outlaws supposed, in their plot to get the reward offered for Willie Rossmore, the little son of the Baltimore millionaire.

His escape, bringing with him in a bundle, the photographs, and well-worn clothing the kidnapped boy had on when taken, he also made known, and they were displayed before the police captain, who said:

"These can wait, and will dry by the time we get back; but Will, you are a natural born detective, and you shall have work as such, that will keep your mother and sister from want; but here are my men, my brave boy, and we will start at once—ho! I forgot that you were wet and shivering, but I'll soon make you comfortable."

An order to an attendant brought from a package room a thick suit and india-rubber coat, into which the boy had no difficulty in getting, as they were nearly double his size, and a policeman's hat sheltered his head.

Then, side by side with Captain Daly, and with a score of policemen following, they stepped out into the driving rain to go upon the raid against the Land Sharks.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RAID.

THE first point of destination of the police squad, was to the door out of which Will had made his escape, and he led the men directly to it.

It was unlocked, as he had left it, but four men were left there, and the others followed the boy around to another street, where was the number at which he had entered the den.

"I've made no mistake in this number, but yet it don't look like the place," he said, as he stopped before the door.

"I hope you have made no mistake, my lad," anxiously said Captain Daly.

"I know I have not, sir; but then I can't find the bell."

In vain he searched, there was no bell at the side, but instead a large old-fashioned knocker.

"This is a white door, sir, as you see, and the other was painted brown."

"Then you are certainly mistaken, my lad."

"No, sir, I am not mistaken, for this is the number, but—"

"But what?" asked Captain Daly, as Will paused.

"They have taken out the bell from the side, sir, and changed the door, since I left."

Several of the policemen laughed, but Captain Daly did not, and said:

"If you say so, Will, I'll believe you."

"Your dark lantern here, Gibson."

The man addressed handed over his lantern, and Will ran the light up and down the door-post.

"Here's where the bell-knob was, sir, and it's been plugged up as you see, by something that fits in."

"You are right, Will," and the captain gave the knocker three sharp blows.

But no response came, and Will said:

"They'll not answer, sir, for they've changed this door to fool me, and they know I've escaped from that man I locked in his room."

"All right, we'll open the door ourselves."

"In with it, men!"

Half a dozen policemen threw themselves against the door; but it withstood their weight, and the locks within only yielded after repeated trials.

Then the door flew open, and all entered the hallway, closing it behind them.

The next door then confronted them, but Will pointed out the panel, and a club smashed that in, when Captain Daly put in his hand and drew back the bolt.

"This is a secure nest, that is certain; but I fear we'll find it deserted," said Captain Daly, and with their lantern-shades raised, they hastily followed Will up the stairs.

He went directly to the door by which he had entered, and the panel was opened with a club, and the officers dashed in, and throwing themselves against the inner door, it yielded to their weight with a crash.

Then they found themselves in the large living room of the band, from whence Will had made his escape.

The bunks were there, the table, chairs, dumb-waiter, and much clothing and bedding was scattered about, showing a hasty departure; but not a soul was present.

"Will you follow down the chimney, sir?" asked Will.

"Yes, I will follow with several of my men, while the remainder break in every door of this nest, which is, indeed, a safe retreat."

"Come, men, I want only those who have cool heads on lofty places to go, for, from what he told me, it will require all your nerve to follow him."

Four of the officers volunteered, and up the ladder went Will, he having in the mean time recovered his hat, shoes and jacket from the floor.

Out upon the roof, in the drenching rain, the boy stepped, and made his way fearlessly along the dizzy height, followed by Captain Daly and his men, who stepped with the greatest caution, for they realized their deadly peril at a glance.

Fearlessly the brave boy led the police captain and his men, the chief calling out:

"Go slow, Will, for a false step here will send us to perdition!"

Reaching the chimney, Will sprang upon the top and disappeared in the interior, the others following, and descending the iron ladder in silence.

Down to the fire-place went Will, and the instant after Captain Daly joined him, and handing the boy his dark-lantern to spring open, the two hastily sprang out into the room.

It was deserted, but the door was partly open, for the lock had been wrenched off.

The pictures were on the wall, the bed all rumpled up, and the lamp was upon the table, while there was every indication of a hasty departure, as in the assembly room.

Then the police went on a voyage of discovery through the house.

It was an old-time mansion, two stories, narrow in build, and ran back against the one on the other street, to which the false chimney belonged, and in it were some half-score of poor, but reputable lodgers, who, aroused by the police, were amazed at the raid upon them.

In answer to inquiries, they said that the

room on the rear, through which the officers had come, was occupied by an artist, they had heard, though no one seemed to know much about him other than that he had a number of visitors.

That there was a secret connected with his living there they had not suspected.

Confident that the lodgers of the house told the truth, Captain Daly left two of his men on duty there, and started around the block to the other house.

He found the party still on guard at the door, and they had not seen nor heard anything of a suspicious nature.

Going around to the other house Captain Daly found that his men had thoroughly searched the place from the cellar to the attic.

They had discovered the door which Will had remembered to have seen in front, and as it was still dripping wet it showed that it had been removed that night from its place, to throw the boy off his guard, but it had, however, failed to do so.

In different rooms of the house was found a quantity of stolen booty, the loss of some of which Captain Daly and his men had heard of, and there was every indication that it was a nest of burglars of a daring and desperate nature.

The Land Sharks had long been known to the police for their bold acts of crime, yet they never before could be located, and even the gruffest of the policemen praised Will for what he had done.

Dawn was now breaking, and a neighbor, coming out of his house, was asked who owned the premises.

He said that his landlord did so, and giving the address, the proprietor of the two houses was at once looked up; but he was amazed at what he heard, for he rented the property to an old woman who said she wished to keep boarders, and had regularly paid her rent three months in advance, and had built a new chimney and made other improvements which she had paid for herself.

The landlord was greatly amazed to find what those improvements were, but he could give no clew as to who or what his tenant was, or where she could be found.

Having discovered the secret retreat of the Land Sharks, however, was a cause of congratulation, and the booty found was considerable, so that Will was praised for his good services, and at once told that he was to consider himself a member of the Secret Service, and to report the following day after he had become rested, for the night of peril and hardship the good-hearted police captain could see had told on the brave boy.

With a heart bounding with joy, Will had hastened home, and his mother and sister greeted him warmly, for they were most anxious regarding his long absence, and with wonder they listened to the strange story of his adventures, while Pearl cried in glee:

"Hurrah for the Boy Detective!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ON SECRET SERVICE.

THE day and night of rest which Will took, he really needed, for his capture, escape and hard work, had indeed been a severe strain upon him.

Captain Daly had picked up a roll of bills in the Land Sharks' rooms which some one of them had dropped in their haste to get away, and he had insisted upon Will's falling heir to the money, though the boy had urged against it.

There were only about twenty dollars, but it was a large sum to Will, and he handed it over to his mother, so that when he awoke from his long sleep, he found a splendid dinner ready, for Pearl had been to the market and spent the five-dollar bill given her with no economical hand.

The mother and her children greatly enjoyed their dinner, and Will then told his mother that Captain Daly had said that his pay would be thirty dollars a month to begin with, and all felt cheered at the prospect, and retired with lighter hearts than they had had the past few weeks.

Upon reporting at the office of Captain Daly the next morning, Will received a warm welcome from all, and was congratulated over and over again upon his nerve and the good services he had rendered.

"Now, Will," the captain said, "I find that Mr. Rossmore, a retired merchant of Baltimore, lost a son Willie some six years ago, and still offers large rewards for his restoration."

"From what you heard from the Land Sharks, you know more than any one else about the

matter, and the boy is doubtless dead, as they stated, and they evidently murdered him."

"Now I wish you to go to Baltimore with these clothes, the photographs and the ring, and see Mr. Rossmore, telling him all, and directing him to the spot on the prairie, as well as you can, where your friend Night Hawk Jerry said the boy was buried."

"Will you go?"

"Certainly, sir, for I am ready to do just what you wish, if you think I am able to accomplish it."

"You are able to do a man's work, Will, after what you did to extricate yourself from the clutches of those Land Sharks."

"Now I will give you the money for your trip, and you had better get a sachel, a suit of clothes and some other things, and get your mother to pack them for you."

"Here are twenty-five dollars to fit you out with, and I'll give you the money for your trip when you are ready to start."

"And here, my boy, I had almost forgotten to give you your badge of office; it is a gold one, and presented to you by the officers of this precinct."

"We would make it a public demonstration, only we do not wish it known outside that we have made a new departure and enlisted a boy in the Secret Service force."

As Captain Daly spoke, he pinned under the boy's coat a handsome gold badge, a shield, upon which was engraved:

"SPECIAL OFFICER

of

METROPOLITAN SECRET SERVICE."

"I will prove deserving of all your kindness, Captain Daly," said Will, with a choking voice, and he sallied forth to make his purchases.

This done, he took them home, and Mrs. Raymond packed his little grip-sack, while Pearl was lost in admiration over the gold badge.

With the shield fastened securely upon his vest, beneath his coat, and his sachel in his hand, Will bade his mother good-by and started for the precinct to get his final orders.

These were given him along with a well-filled purse, and Captain Daly went with him across the ferry to see him on board the train.

As he took his seat alone in the sleeping car, which the kind-hearted captain had provided him with, Will felt his own importance, and his heart was full of gratitude that he had, by his own acts, become able to earn a support for his mother and sister.

Arriving in Baltimore, he went to the hotel to which Captain Daly had directed him, and, after breakfast, with the photographs and clothing of the kidnapped boy wrapped up in a bundle, he made inquiries as to where the home of Mr. Rossmore was, and set out to go there.

He found it without much difficulty, a superb country seat in the outskirts of the city, and he recognized at a glance the scenes of the photographs he had with him.

A gardener was at work upon a bed of flowers, and approaching him, Will asked if Mr. Rossmore was at home.

"No, young gentleman, they have gone to their farm for a few weeks on the eastern shore," was the answer.

At once Will determined to follow them there, and after getting the directions, he asked:

"Has Mr. Rossmore ever heard of his missing child?"

"No, indeed, not a word, and it's my opinion he never will, as I think little Willie is dead; but master thinks he'll find him yet; but Lordy! you hain't Master Willie, are you, for you do look mazing like him."

"My name is Willie, but I am not Mr. Rossmore's son, though others have said I look like him."

"You do, for a certainty, sir, and master and his wife will see the likeness, I'm sure, if you are going there."

"Yes, I am going there, for it is important that I should see them," and bidding the old gardener good-by, Will returned to the hotel and discovered that a boat left the next afternoon for the town nearest the Rossmore farm.

So he went down to the wharf and secured his berth, and amused himself looking about the city until time to go on board the next day.

He had a pleasant state-room, and, as he made himself at home in it, he felt that he was becoming quite a traveler.

Enjoying the run down the Chesapeake, it was late when he retired, and he dropped off quickly to sleep, lulled by the motion of the boat.

He was awakened by the hum of voices, and saw a light in his face, strangely like the glare of a bull's-eye lantern.

But he at once saw that it came through a knot-hole in the partition between his and the next state-room, and within a few feet of him were two men, one lying in the berth, the other seated upon a chair, and they were talking in a low tone.

Without stopping up his ears, Will could not but hear all they said, and the voice of one seemed familiar.

Putting his eye near the knot-hole, to his surprise he recognized the man in the berth as Night Hawk Jerry.

The face of the other he did not know.

What he heard them say was as follows:

"Well, Nick, we can go and strike old Rossmore for all we can get out of him, after we attend to this farmer on board that I tell you has the cash he got for a boat-load of cattle he took up to the city and sold.

"He stopped at the same hotel with me, and when I told him I was going down to see Mr. Rossmore, he told me he lived near him, and directed me how to get there, while he said he would ask me to ride out with him, only he had come to the village where he boarded the boat on horseback.

"Now we can get a rig and drive out ahead of the farmer, lay for him on the road, and just take in his pile, which goes up into the thousands. I am sure.

"Then we can go to see old Rossmore and see what we can get out of him, under promise of bringing him his boy."

"You think he'll put up anything?" asked the man addressed as Nick.

"Yes, he'll put up something, though he's been very freely bled by frauds; but, if it had not been for our being taken in by that boy Captain Cruel picked up in New York and who was, I admit, just the fellow if he had not played us false, we'd have got a clean fifty thousand from Rossmore."

"The boy got your crib raided, you told me?"

"Well he did, and but for our pal who slept in the exit room, waking up as he did, we'd have all been caught, for the boy led the police upon us in an hour after he got away."

"He was a sharp one for a kid."

"Now Nick he was; but you must go and turn in now, and to-morrow, as soon as the boat lands, we'll hurry ashore and get a wagon to head off the farmer."

"Good-night, Jerry."

"Good-night Nick," and the latter personage left the state-room of his fellow villain, and sought his own quarters, while Will, scarcely having breathed as he overheard what was said, placed a pillow against the knot-hole, and tried to go to sleep.

But in vain, for his brain was too full of thoughts, and it was nearly dawn when he at last sunk into a deep slumber; but he had formed a plot in his fertile mind to thwart the two rascals in their bold game of double robbery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HEADED OFF.

AFTER hearing what he had, Will was most anxious to remain unseen, for he knew that Night Hawk Jerry would recognize him very quickly, and that would spoil all.

So he feigned sickness, had his breakfast brought to his state-room the next morning, and then, as the boat landed at the town where the two conspirators were to leave it, he grasped his gripsack and cautiously went forward.

The men leaped ashore, when the gangplank was run out, and Will followed them at considerable distance up into the village.

There were quite a number of passengers, so that the boy was unable to select the one against whom the robbers had plotted.

But he watched his men, saw them go to a livery stable, and soon after ride out of town at a gallop.

Instantly he went to that same stable, and a few minutes afterward was in a buggy with a driver, going on the road which the robbers had taken, for the livery man told him how he had directed them.

By fast driving he came in sight of them, and then he told his man to draw rein and wait, while he got out and went ahead on foot.

By keeping close in to the woods he kept out of sight of the robber pair, and saw them turn into a thickly-wooded point at a bend in the road, where the underbrush was very dense.

"That is their ambush," he muttered to himself, and he returned to the buggy, getting in just as a horseman appeared coming along the road.

As he drew near, Will saw that he was a fine-looking man with athletic form, and a kindly yet strangely stern face.

He was well dressed and appeared to be a well-to-do country gentleman, and the boy remembered to have seen him on the Chesapeake steamboat.

As he drew near to where the buggy was waiting, he said pleasantly, recognizing the negro driver:

"Well, Hercules, out for a drive?" he said.

"Yas, Massa Lomax, I is takin' dis young gemman on a leetle drive, sah," answered Hercules, who had gained his name from his great strength.

"Pardon me, sir, but may I have a word with you?" said Will, politely.

"Certainly, young man," replied the farmer.

"You came down the bay on the steamer last night with me, sir."

"I came down on the steamer, but I do not remember to have seen you, though your face is strangely, so *strangely* familiar to me," and the farmer gazed fixedly into the face of the boy.

"We have not met, sir; but may I ask if you did not take up to Baltimore a cargo of cattle and sell them there?"

"I did."

"Well, sir, I overheard a plot between two men last night to rob you on your way home this morning.

"My state-room adjoined theirs, and a knot in the wooden partition had fallen out, or been pushed out, just at my head, and I saw the men and heard their plot.

"One of the men is a noted New York crook, and I am anxious to capture him, while his companion is doubtless a Baltimore thief."

"You surprise me, young sir, and I thank you most sincerely, for I have with me quite a large sum of money, and taken at disadvantage I might lose both it and my life, though I am armed."

"These are desperate men, sir, or at least I know one to be, and I am determined to capture him if possible, for I can get him held until a requisition from the Governor of New York can be obtained."

The farmer smiled at the words of the youth, and said:

"You are a plucky fellow, and we had better send for a constable from the village, for Hercules will go."

"I am an officer, sir, and I have formed a plan to capture them," and Will opened his coat and showed his badge, not only to the farmer's surprise, but to Hercules's great awe and admiration.

"Well, my young friend, what is your plan?"

"To tie my handkerchief about my face, and muffle up, laying back in the buggy as though I was sick, while I drive by the point of ambush, which is at the bend in the road above here.

"When I get by, I will leave the buggy with Hercules, and we can get close back to the place of ambush, and you can come along, and as the men approach you, we will be close on their tracks."

"A good plan, my lad; but let us know each other, as we are to act together.

"My name is Kent Lomax; I am a farmer, and live not far from here."

"My name is Will Raymond, sir."

"Raymond!" and the farmer started.

"Yes, sir."

"Where are you from?"

"New York, sir."

"Ah, me! Your name recalls the strange resemblance your face bears to one I once knew, and it is strange, indeed, that face and name should be so alike," and the farmer spoke in a voice that was full of sadness; but in an instant he continued in a different tone:

"Well, Master Raymond, I am glad to be associated with you in this little affair, and you are the captain, so go ahead with your plan."

After a few other arrangements the boy drove on in the buggy with Hercules, his face tied up, a scarf about his neck and his hat drawn down over his eyes.

But his keen eyes were watching the road as they drove along, and he detected in the bushes the two men in ambush.

As agreed upon with Kent Lomax, Hercules dropped his whip and sprung out to get it, so that he, watching back down the road, should know just the spot where the robbers were.

Then the buggy drove on, and once around the bend they turned into a secluded spot and at once sprung out and hitched the horse, while they crept up a ravine, which Kent Lomax had told them would lead them almost to the bend in the road.

"They could not have chosen a better place for us to surprise them," said Will as he hurried on with the negro.

"No, massa, dat am so, and I awful glad I

cum with you, for maybe I git suthin' out o' dis scrimmage," returned Hercules.

"You shall, Hercules, and I hope it will be gold, rather than lead."

"I don't want no lead, massa," and Hercules, picked up a stick, to serve as a club, as they went along.

Soon they came to the end of the ravine, and, creeping up to the top of the bank, Will looked over.

He quickly drew back his head, for the two men were not sixty feet from him, standing behind a clump of bushes on the edge of the road.

"You see um, massa?" whispered Hercules.

"Yes; and Mr. Lomax is already coming, and but a couple of hundred yards away," and Will took from his pocket a small revolver, but of large caliber, and glanced at it carefully.

"Now I'll watch, Hercules, and you be ready to run out with me."

"Yas, massa."

In silence then they waited until, suddenly, the words were heard:

"Halt! Your money or your life!"

"Come!" and with the word Will and Hercules bounded from the ravine.

They saw farmer Lomax at a halt in the road, one man grasping the rein of his horse, and the other holding a pistol up in his face.

The farmer sat perfectly quiet, and the men each had a handkerchief over his face, with holes cut in to see through.

"Come, out with your money, and lose no time, if you value your life!" sternly ordered Jerry, the Night Hawk.

The farmer thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out his well-filled wallet, and tossed it upon the ground, just as clear and sharp came the cry:

"Hands up, Night Hawk Jerry!"

The two men uttered a cry of alarm and turned, to see the boy and the negro almost upon them; and recognizing Will, Night Hawk fired.

The bullet clipped a hole in Will's hat-brim, and at that moment the boy pulled trigger, just as the robber fired a second shot.

Down dropped Night Hawk, a dead man, for Will's bullet had pierced his brain, while at the same moment Kent Lomax had hurled himself upon the other robber and held him at his mercy.

"I was sorry to have to kill him, but he shot me through the hat, for I felt it turn on my head, and his second bullet clipped my arm, but I guess did no harm," said Will.

"My boy, you are worth your weight in gold; let me see if you are hurt," and Kent Lomax turned his man over to Hercules, while he drew off the boy's jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeve.

There was a slight gash on the left arm that was not of much consequence, and Kent Lomax quickly bound a handkerchief about it, while he said:

"You will need no requisition for your man, Master Raymond, while this one we will give into the hands of the village constable.

"Hercules, mount my horse and ride back to the village for the constable and the coroner, and I will remain here with this young man."

The negro departed, while Will said:

"My errand here, sir, was to see Mr. Rossmore upon an important matter, and I am anxious to catch the boat back to-night, so I might drive on to his farm and get back here by the time the constable arrives, if you do not mind."

"Certainly not, and Mr. Rossmore lives on the road a mile from here.

"You will come to a bridge crossing a stream with a mill upon it, and the Rossmore place is just beyond on the hill in full view."

Thanking the farmer Will sprung into the buggy and drove on.

As he reached the bridge he came to a halt, while he said:

"Why, this is the very scene that mother painted and gave to Colonel Ivey.

"How strange her painting should be so like a real scene way down here on the eastern shore of Maryland," and, wondering at the coincidence, Will drove on up to the handsome country home on the hillside.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNKNOWN KINDRED TIES.

LITTLE dreaming that he was approaching the old home of his mother, her birth-place, and that of her mother before her, the home from which she had fled that, to her, fatal Christmas eve, Will Raymond drove up to the hitching-rock and sprung out of his buggy.

A gentleman sat upon the piazza, smoking a

cigar and reading a paper, but arose at his approach.

"Good-morning, young gentleman," he said pleasantly, and then his eyes became riveted upon Will's face.

He was a man of fifty perhaps, with noble countenance, tinged with sadness, and a look of anxiety.

"My boy, who are you?" he said, quickly, before Will could speak.

"Is this Mr. Rossmore?" asked Will.

"Yes, my son."

"My name is Will Raymond, sir, and I am a special officer of the New York Secret Service, sent to see you upon a matter of interest to you."

"About my lost boy? Quick! tell me if you have any news of him whom I must say you most closely resemble, and—"

"I do resemble your son, sir, and so much so that a gang of scoundrels were to use me as a foil to make money out of you."

"But you are not my boy?" He would be about your age, and look like you, I think," and Mr. Rossmore was greatly excited.

"No, Mr. Rossmore, I am not your son; but I have come to tell you all I know of him, and I am sorry to say that you must give up all hope of ever seeing him alive."

"No! no! no! I cannot, I cannot!" and Mr. Rossmore listened to the whole story that Will had to tell, from his meeting with the man who had sent him on the errand, to his killing Night Hawk by the roadside.

"And, Mr. Rossmore," continued Will, "when I escaped from the den of the Land Sharks, I brought with me the clothes, which they said your boy had on when stolen, and his ring, and they were to bring them with me, to prove that I was your Willie."

"I will get them," and going out to the buggy he returned with his sachel, and the clothing and ring were exhibited.

"My poor, poor boy! these are indeed his little suit and ring; how well I remember them; but, my noble boy, I must see the grave that they say he was buried in on the prairie, before I give up all hope."

"If it contains the remains of a small child, I can but believe, and besides, Willie had his left arm broken when a baby, by falling from the lap of his nurse, and this will identify the bones as his."

"Oh, may Heaven's anger fall on those who murdered my little boy!" and Mr. Rossmore bowed his head with grief, just as a lady, whose locks were prematurely gray from sorrow and suspense, came out upon the piazza.

"Husband, I have heard all, and I believe at last that our boy, our little Willie, is dead," she said, and turning to Will, she greeted him most kindly, while she too was struck by the likeness of the young detective to her son.

"Have you parents, my boy, and a home, for gladly would I give you one," she said to Will.

"Yes, my noble boy, come to us and be our son," cried Mr. Rossmore.

"I have a mother and sister living in New York, and I am their only support, and I must return to them, though I thank you most kindly for your good offer to me," said Will, touched by the grief and generosity of Mr. Rossmore and his wife.

"Well, my boy, I would not rob your mother of you for worlds, but you must let me help you, and if you ever need a friend come to us, for we live all alone here, and are strangely restless since the loss of my boy."

"We have traveled abroad, but came back soon to our Baltimore home, and then we have come here, for this place was the home of my wife's cousin and adopted sister, whose fate is a mystery to us, and a sad one, for she ran away from home one night, fifteen years ago, leaving behind her that noble man, you saved from robbery, Kent Lomax, to whom she was engaged."

"She deserted him for a villain, a man whose life Kent Lomax had saved, and she fled with the rascal to Philadelphia, and was followed there."

"Kent Lomax tried to avenge the double wrong, for the poor girl's mother died from the shock, and the villain shot him, and for months he lay at the point of death, and, when he recovered all trace of the man was lost."

"Years after her father died, and my wife here now has the estate, which will be hers unless her adopted sister returns to claim it, or her children do, if she has any; otherwise Mrs. Rossmore is the next heir."

"So you see, wherever we go, we have sad memories to confront us; but here both of us are well, and more content than elsewhere, so we often come; but I am detaining you with family

history, when you are anxious to return to the scene of your affray down the road, and I will accompany you."

"Wife, please send the carriage after me," and so saying Mr. Rossmore got into the buggy with Will and drove back to where Kent Lomax had been left with the dead man and the bound prisoner.

On the way Mr. Rossmore asked:

"My son, do you think you could find the grave of my little Will, from the description you had of it?"

"I think so, sir."

"Will you go West with me and find out?"

"If I can get permission, sir."

"Well, you can telegraph what you have done to your chief, and ask permission to go with me, and I will have my family physician accompany us, for he set Willie's arm when it was broken, and could tell if it was my child in the grave."

"But we will talk more of this, for there is farmer Lomax," and a moment after they drove up to the spot where Kent Lomax stood, while coming in view at the same time were a number of persons on horseback and in buggies.

Hercules and the constable rode in advance, and as they rode up and dismounted, Kent Lomax introduced Will to the officer of the law, and his story was again told, the coroner standing near with a jury which he had selected from the crowd.

All gazed upon Will as a hero; but the boy shrunk from observation, and remarked to Kent Lomax:

"I hate notoriety that comes from taking the life of a human being, villain though he was."

"That is the proper spirit, my lad; but the coroner wishes to ask you a few questions, and then I would like to have you go home with me as my guest, while I also desire to compensate you in some way for your services to me."

"Thank you, sir, but I am paid for my duty, and can accept no other reward, while I am to go back with Mr. Rossmore."

So it was settled, and as Mr. Rossmore's carriage drove up, Will got into it with his host, and drove away, followed by Kent Lomax on horseback, while Hercules returned to town with the buggy and two horses of the robbers, along with those who had come out to the scene upon learning what had occurred.

That Hercules had fared well at the hands of Will, Mr. Rossmore and Kent Lomax was evident by the happy look upon his honest face, and the words:

"I wish dere'd be a robber-killin' every day, and Sunday too, and dis nigger'd get rich."

At a place where the roads branched off Kent Lomax bade them good-by, grasping Will's hand warmly, and saying:

"You know my name and address, my boy, and if you ever need a friend don't hesitate to call on me, for I have no kindred that are dear to me and I am rich, and would be glad to serve you—so command me."

Thus they parted, the man who had been engaged to his mother—the man whom she deserted to marry the man who had so cruelly treated her.

Neither knew what they were to each other, and yet each seemed drawn toward the other.

Nor did Will suspect for an instant, an hour afterward, that he was eating dinner beneath the roof where his mother had been born, and that Mrs. Rossmore was his own aunt.

That night Mr. Rossmore and Will took the boat back to Baltimore, and having sent from the village a long and explicit dispatch to Captain Daly, an answer was found awaiting them upon their arrival at the hotel in the city the following day.

The answer read:

"NEW YORK POLICE DEP'T.

"Special Officer, WILL RAYMOND:—

"Your telegram most satisfactory, and will get requisition for Night Hawk's comrade and have him brought here."

"You have acted as I knew you would in everything, and the chief joins me in congratulations upon your pluck and detective skill."

"You have full permission to go West with Mr. Rossmore, and your leave is unlimited. Success to you."

That night the Westward bound through Express on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad carried Mr. Rossmore, his family physician, and Will Raymond, the Boy Detective, and their destination was the North Platte river in Nebraska.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GRAVE ON THE PRAIRIE.

It was toward sunset, one pleasant afternoon, some ten days after the visit of the Boy Detective to the eastern shore of Maryland, that a

party of horsemen were visible driving over a Nebraska prairie.

The man in advance wore buckskin, and was a thorough plainsman in dress and appearance.

Behind him were an army officer, wearing a captain's uniform, riding side by side with Will Raymond, while closely following were Mr. Rossmore and his physician, who had accompanied him from Baltimore.

Bringing up the rear were a sergeant and a dozen cavalymen, two of whom were leading several pack-horses.

The party had left Fort McPherson on the Platte, whose commander had kindly sent an officer and soldiers, under a skillful guide, with Mr. Rossmore, as an escort.

Will had told the buckskin guide just what he had heard the Land Sharks say regarding the spot where they had buried Willie Rossmore, and the plainsman had expressed himself as acquainted with the Lone Tree, while he also said that there were fully a dozen graves about it.

Soon the tree, standing alone on the prairie, and upon the bank of a small stream, loomed up in the distance.

"There's the Lone Tree," said the guide, "and we'll reach thar jist about dark."

All eyes were turned upon the distant and solitary cottonwood tree, standing like a giant sentinel upon the prairie, and the horses were urged on at a more rapid pace.

But the shadows of night fell before the tree was reached, and it was decided to go into camp and make a search in the morning.

One of the pack-horses carried some pine-knots, and a fire was soon kindled, while another carried some canvas flies which were stretched as a shelter.

There were ample provisions along, with plenty of game shot during the day's ride, and soon a most tempting supper was spread out before the hungry party.

As for Will Raymond, it was to him a most enjoyable expedition, for he had often read of a wild life upon the plains, and with the buckskin-clad guide, the soldier escort, and the knowledge that there was danger of an attack by Indians, he was charmed.

After the supper was dispatched, sentinels were placed out upon the prairie, at some distance, the horses were staked out within the circle formed by the four guards, and the rest of the party sought the shelter of the tent flies to sleep.

No, not all, for Mr. Rossmore was too deeply moved by the belief that he was near the grave of his long-lost child, and he paced to and fro, beneath the solitary tree, his thoughts busy with his grief.

Then there was another that did not care to sleep, and that was Will Raymond.

The surroundings, the wildness of the scene, the prairie, the soldiers, all impressed him, and he strolled about the camp, while as the moon arose he walked out to a sentinel on duty and had a long talk with him.

At last, as midnight came, and the sentinels were relieved by others, he went to the shelter, wrapped himself in his blanket, and soon sunk to sleep.

The sun was rising when he awoke, and Mr. Rossmore, who lay near him, had just gotten up from his blanket couch.

The guide already had breakfast ready, and when it was over, the search for the grave began.

As the guide had said there were a number of graves in the vicinity of the tree for several trails led by it, and many a dear one, dying upon the plains had been laid to rest there, where the solitary cottonwood would serve as a monument to their memory.

"Now give me the particulars, boy pard, the time he was buried, his age when he was put here, and I guess kin pick out his restin' place," said the guide.

Will gave the full particulars, as he knew them, and the guide set to work.

Grave after grave he went to, and left, making some remark at each one.

"This one looks to be about the age you say, boy pard, and it were made as though in a hurry, and with a don't care feelin', and not as them builds a dirt house over them they loves."

"Sergeant, bring yer utensils and dig earth here," said the guide, and he stood over a small grave that indeed did look as though it had been hastily dug and filled in, for others, even those smaller, and evidently with the remains of children in them, were made as though the heart of the diggers had been in the work.

Two soldiers now stepped forward with spades and the work was begun of turning the earth from the grave.

It was not a very long task, and soon the end was reached, the moldering bones of a body were found.

Tenderly they were taken out, having been wrapped in a blanket, and from a felt hat that had been upon the head, a mass of dark-brown curls were taken.

Mr. Rossmore took the hat and its precious burden tenderly, and asked:

"Doctor, this looks like Willie's hair."

"Yes, exactly the shade," was the reply, and the doctor bent over the bones, while all present removed their hats with reverent awe, Will Raymond having unconsciously set the example.

In deathlike silence all stood while the doctor placed the bones together, and said:

"This was the body of a child about Willie's age, at the time that our young friend here says they killed him, and it was a boy—yes, here is the left arm, and—it has been broken!"

"God have mercy! it is the body of my poor boy," groaned Mr. Rossmore.

"Yes, Rossmore, it is, and I can swear to it, for here is the broken arm, the fracture being just below the elbow, as was Willie's, while you remember the tooth I took out for him one day?"

"Yes, he would not go to a dentist, but wished you to take it out, so I sent for you."

"He had no other tooth missing, and none here are, you see; but great God!" and the doctor arose to his feet, holding the skull in his hands.

All pressed about him, while he continued, pointing to the skull:

"Do you see that fracture?"

"It tells the story that he was murdered!"

It was too true, the fractured skull showed where a death-blow had been given the poor boy, but whether by accident or design, who could tell?

As all crowded about the doctor, gazing at the skull, Will Raymond sprung down into the grave and picked up something that had caught his eye in the loose dirt.

"See here!" he called out, and he held up a gold watch and upon the inside case was engraved the name

"ED ELLIS. 18—."

"Mr. Rossmore, that is the name of the man who was with Night Hawk Jerry, whom I shot, and he was one of the kidnappers, and here with your son, for this watch proves it, and it fell out of his pocket when he was burying him," said Will.

"Boy pard, you've got a long head, for the man who laid this boy's remains in the grave, dropped that watch," remarked the guide.

"Then it will be a fatal evidence against him, and I will leave nothing undone to hang him," sternly said Mr. Rossmore.

Then the bones were gathered together, and being placed upon one of the pack-animals, the party started on the return to the fort.

Arriving there, the bones were placed in a coffin, and Mr. Rossmore, the doctor and Will Raymond started upon their return East, the grief-stricken father having given the guide and the soldiers a most generous gift as an appreciation of their services.

CHAPTER XXI.

RETRIBUTION AT LAST.

It was at Chicago that Will Raymond parted with Mr. Rossmore and the doctor, for he was anxious to get back to New York, as he knew his mother had not been very well when he left.

In vain did Mr. Rossmore urge him to accept a check for a large amount for his most valuable services, for the boy was firm in his refusal, taking only sufficient for his expenses.

Finding him firm in his decision to accept no money consideration, Mr. Rossmore went into a jewelry establishment in Chicago and purchased an elegant watch and chain, having engraved on it the name of Will Raymond and his own, with the date of the finding of Willie's body, the spot, and the words:

"As an appreciation of a service rendered that can never be repaid."

Two boxes, one marked for Mrs. Raymond, the other for Pearl, Mr. Rossmore also gave the youth for his mother and sister, and, with the feeling that he had done his duty well, and would win the praise of his chief, Will set out on his return to New York.

It was just supper-time, after an absence of one month, that he knocked at the door of his home, and heard a voice say:

"Come in!"

In he walked, and, with a cry of joy, the arms of Mrs. Raymond were about her son, while Pearl clung to his hand in warm welcome.

"Oh, brother! how like a man you have grown; but you did not lose your gold badge, did you?" cried Pearl.

"No, sis, I have it safe, and more, for this was a present to me," and he exhibited his watch and chain to the delight of his mother and sister.

"And here is something for you, mother, a present from the same kind gentleman," and when Mrs. Raymond untied a packet he gave her, a pair of superb diamond earrings were revealed.

"Oh, mother!" cried Pearl.

"And this is for you, sis, from the same source."

Pearl opened her box with trembling hands, and took from a velvet case a necklace of pearls.

"Mr. Rossmore was determined to pay me after all," said Will.

"But, my son, tell us about these superb presents," Mrs. Raymond said.

"I will, mother, and it is a long, strange story," and the Boy Detective told the story of his travels.

"We cannot give these presents back, can we, Will, for they ill become Pearl and I in our poverty," said Mrs. Raymond.

"No, mother, for it would deeply offend good Mr. Rossmore, and he was determined to repay me in some way; but I intend to be rich some day, and then your presents won't be amiss; but, mother, did you say that you knew Mr. Rossmore?"

"I said, Will, that I knew a gentleman once of that name," and the woman hastily wiped away a tear.

"But, mother, the strangest of all, and which I forgot to tell you, was the story he told me about his home, and how his wife's cousin and adopted sister had treated the farmer I saved from the robbers."

"And the view of his home was just like the painting you gave Colonel Ivey, and I seemed to recognize it as soon as I saw it, while both the farmer, Mr. Kent Lomax—"

"What name did you speak, Will?" and Mrs. Raymond sprung to her feet, white and trembling.

"The name of the farmer, mother, Kent Lomax," said Will, in amazement at his mother's excitement.

"And you have seen that man, Kent Lomax?" she asked, hoarsely.

"Yes, mother; did you know him?"

Unheeding the question, she said:

"Tell me of him."

"Well, mother, he is a tall, handsome man, with a stern face, but a kind one, and he is a rich farmer, living near the home of Mr. Rossmore."

"He was very good to me, and I felt sorry for him when Mr. Rossmore told me he had been engaged to marry Mrs. Rossmore's sister, a young and beautiful girl, whose home had been at the Mill Farm."

"But there had come a wicked city man down there, and though Mr. Lomax had saved his life, he had made the young lady love him and had run off with her."

"It was a terrible blow, for the mother of the young lady died of a broken heart—"

"Died! died! oh God!" groaned Mrs. Raymond, and then she said in a voice that was hoarse and quivering:

"Go on! what more did you hear, my son?"

"Mr. Rossmore told me that the farmer, Kent Lomax, followed the runaway couple to Philadelphia, and fought a duel with the wicked man who stole his sweetheart, and received a wound that nearly cost him his life; but since then they have never heard of Mrs. Rossmore's sister, or her husband, for he was caught cheating at cards soon after and driven out of the city by those who had been his friends."

"But I felt so sorry for Mr. Lomax, mother, for he is such a splendid man."

"And the father of this girl who so wickedly fled from her home?" asked Mrs. Raymond in the same hoarse whisper.

"He died some years ago, and was buried in the family burying-ground; but Mr. Rossmore did not speak unkindly of the young lady, whom he said his wife had always loved as though she had been her own little sister, for she was some years younger than Mrs. Rossmore."

"But, mother, I have something else to show you, and it is this gold watch, with a small piece of chain attached, which I found in the grave of Willie Rossmore, and it bears the name on it of Ed Ellis, the man now in prison, and who was the comrade of Night Hawk Jerry."

"Ed Ellis! let me see the watch!" and Mrs.

Raymond grasped it from Will's hand and glanced at the name.

"Yes, Ed Ellis, his friend," she gasped, and as she did so her head fell back, and her lips crimsoned with her life-blood.

"Oh, Pearl! mother has a hemorrhage! Quick! run for Doctor Churchill!" cried Will, supporting his mother in his arms, while his sister bounded away to fetch the physician, whom Mrs. Raymond had been compelled to send for on several occasions.

Pearl soon returned, for fortunately she had met the doctor almost at the door, and under his care the hemorrhage was stayed and Mrs. Raymond was greatly relieved.

"You must keep her very quiet, and watch her carefully, for this has been brought on by some sudden shock," said the doctor to Will, as he departed, promising to send a faithful nurse to take care of the poor invalid.

The nurse came and in the morning Mrs. Raymond appeared much better; but she was very pale and weak, and her face had become haggard from suffering; but she whispered:

"I must live for you, my children, bitter as life is to me, and I will do so, for you are my all in this world."

With a heart too full to speak Will kissed his mother and went out to report to Captain Daly, the poor woman saying aloud as he left the room:

"My punishment is greater than I can bear, for my act, I now know placed my poor mother in her grave, and nearly cost Kent Lomax his life."

"I knew not of this duel, for he never told me."

"But I erred, and I have suffered, and now a fearful retribution has come upon me; but, for the sake of my children I will cling to life until they are old enough to do without me," and closing her eyes, while her lips moved as if in prayer, the poor woman sunk into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER XXII.

INSNARED BY A WATCH.

THE entrance of the Boy Detective into the police precinct caused a sensation, and his hand was grasped in welcome at every step he took.

Captain Daly heard his name called and advanced to the door of his private office to meet him, while he cried:

"Welcome back, my Wizard Will, for I received your telegram from Chicago, and you have worked wonders."

"Bravo for Wizard Will!" cried a tall sergeant; while a policeman said:

"The captain has well named the boy, in calling him Wizard Will."

And thus the nickname went the rounds, the Boy Detective found himself verbally christened as Wizard Will.

For two hours was Wizard Will, as I must now call him, closeted with Captain Daly, and then the two came out of the private office together.

A carriage was called, and they drove at once to the Tombs.

The police captain gained ready admission, and he said to the officer in charge, after he had introduced his young *protege*:

"Wizard Will here wishes a private talk with your prisoner from Maryland, who calls himself Ed Ellis."

The officer bowed assent, and Will was conducted to the cell of Ed Ellis, the man whom he had captured in Maryland, at the time that he had shot Night Hawk Jerry.

"Ho, boy, what do you want here?" gruffly said the prisoner as Will entered and was locked in with him.

"I am here to have a talk with you, Ellis."

"What have you got to say?"

"I wish you to tell me if Night Hawk Jerry really killed little Willie Rossmore, or if he died of exposure and starvation, as he told me was the case?"

"I don't know anything about the kid."

"Did you never see him?"

"No."

"When did you first meet Jerry?"

"A few months ago."

"Did he never tell you about the boy's death?"

"He said he died, that was all."

"Were you ever in the West?"

"No."

"Not in Nebraska?"

"No."

"Suppose I tell you that I know something of your past?"

"I don't believe it."

"You are from Philadelphia?"

"Who said so?"

"You had a watch presented to you once."

"Yes, I did, and I lost it."

"Suppose I tell you that I know where it is?"

"I'll bet you don't."
 "When did you have it last?"
 "It was stolen from me in camp, some six years ago."
 Will did not show the slightest sign of having seen that the man made a slip of the tongue, as he asked:
 "In a mining-camp, you say?"
 "No, in a camp on the prairies."
 "Some six years ago, in Nebraska?"
 "Yes."
 "Ah! you have been West, then?"
 The man saw his mistake and recoiled, as he said:
 "What if I have?"
 "Suppose I tell you I know where your watch is?"
 "Do you?"
 "Yes."
 "I'll bet my life Night Hawk Jerry was the thief that stole it from me, after all, and you found it on his body after you killed him."
 "You have the chain that was attached to it?"
 "No, I hain't."
 "Well, this chain, taken from you in Maryland when you were captured, is it not the same that you had on your watch?" and Will showed a gold chain of a peculiar kind of pattern, that had been taken, with other things, from the prisoner when he was captured.
 "No."
 "And you think Night Hawk Jerry stole it from you?"
 "Yes."
 "About six years ago?"
 "About that."
 "Well, tell me how you lost it."
 "I don't know exactly, for I had it one afternoon, and when I went to wind it up that night it was gone."
 "This was in Nebraska?"
 "Yes."
 "And Jerry was with you?"
 "Yes."
 "Who else?"
 "We were with an emigrant train, and going out West to homestead land."
 "You had your own wagon and horses?"
 "Yes."
 "And joined the train on the march?"
 "Yes; but we didn't stay long in company with it, as it wasn't going our way."
 "Did you remain long in Nebraska?"
 "No."
 "Why not?"
 "Because we didn't like it there."
 "And you returned East?"
 "Yes."
 "And you became a Baltimore crook?"
 "You seem to know."
 "And Jerry became a New York crook?"
 "As he's dead and not on trial, I may as well say that is about the size of it."
 "Yet you said awhile ago you had not known Jerry more than a year?"
 "I had forgotten."
 "Well, Ellis, I have got your watch!"
 "The deuce you say!"
 "Yes; and I'll tell you where I found it."
 "Where?"
 "It had a piece of chain to it, a link of the very chain I hold here of yours."
 "Yes, I remember now; I had the old chain fixed over."
 "And, Ellis, I found your watch in the grave of the little boy you murdered!"
 The man gave a cry in spite of himself, and became livid, while Wizard Will held up the watch, all covered with dirt as it was, and said:
 "Here is the watch, and I took it out of the grave of Willie Rossmore; and in burying him, it rolled out of your pocket and fell there."
 "And more, the boy's skull was crushed in by a blow you gave him—"
 "No—no! Jerry hit him that blow," cried the man in quivering tones.
 "Jerry is not here to deny it, and you have confessed to having been there with him, while this watch tells the story that you at least buried him, and you and Night Hawk were the ones who kidnapped him; so I tell you, Ellis, you are the murderer of Willie Rossmore."
 "If I've got to swing, boy, you'll not be there to see me die!" was the savage threat of the man, and he sprang like a tiger at Wizard Will.
 But the boy stooped quickly and avoided him, while the door was thrown open and Captain Daly sprang in and seized him, followed by the officer in charge of the prisoner.
 "No, my man, you can commit no more murders the short time you have to live, for a jury will soon send you to the gallows," said Captain Daly, and with Wizard Will he left the cell, while the officer of the prison remarked:

"We heard all he said, Wizard Will, and a stenographer took it down, so he is doomed; and the watch insured him, for without it he could not have been tried for other than highway robbery; now it will be for murder, as well."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WIZARD WILL'S LUCK.

As soon as he left the cell of Ellis, the kidnapper of Willie Rossmore, Wizard Will went directly home, for he was anxious about his mother. But he was delighted to find her much better, though weak, and the iron will of the unfortunate woman was doing much to build her up again, after her determination not to give up and leave her children alone in the world.
 "Mother, Captain Daly has increased my pay to fifty dollars a month, so we will move to a pleasant little cottage out on Long Island, which belongs to him, and there is no rent to pay, and it is furnished, and has five acres of land, with a fine garden, a cow, and a horse and buggy."
 "Then there are plenty of flowers, and chickens, and though the cottage has but five rooms in it, it must be a lovely place, for the captain's brother lived there until a few days ago, when he went West, and left it to him," and Will's enthusiastic description of the little home got Mrs. Raymond quite excited over it, while Pearl was wild with joy.
 "And you say there is no rent to pay, Will?" asked his mother.
 "The captain said he was just going to arrange with a man living near there, to give him the use of the horse, cow and garden, to take care of the place, while he'll give it to us if we go there to live, and he can get me a pass on the railroad, so that will cost nothing, and it is not half an hour's run to the station where our home is, so you must cheer up, mother, for life is getting brighter for us."
 "But are there any schools, my son?"
 "Yes, mother; one only a hundred yards away, where Pearl can go; and the captain is good enough to say I can have two hours each day to study here in town, while he'll not put me on night work if it can be avoided, and only on special detective service then."
 "That is most kind of him, Will, and I must see him and thank him."
 "And mother," proceeded Will, whose enthusiasm increased as he continued to enumerate, "Captain Daley says I'll have a chance to earn special fees if I am successful in my work, so that we need not stint ourselves in living, and I suggested an idea to him that he was delighted with, and said I might carry it out."
 "What was that, my son?"
 "Well, you know that I am pretty well acquainted with New York, and I said I would like to form a league of 'Boy Detectives,' for I feel that I could do a great deal of good with them, and he said he thought so too, and I should be captain."
 "Ah! my son, I fear you are taking a very heavy weight upon your young shoulders."
 "I can stand it, mother."
 "You've always said, mamma, that brother had an old head on young shoulders; but he's got broad shoulders, too, and can stand it," Pearl remarked in her quaint way, for she would wager her life upon her brother being able to do anything that a man could accomplish.
 "Well, Will, you are the bread-winner of our home now, and the head, young as you are, and I will not be the one to put a straw in your way against success, for you seem to have a real talent for detective work."
 "Thank you, mother, and they have dubbed me, on the force, Wizard Will, as they say I have done wonders as a Boy Detective."
 "You have, indeed, my son, and in a few days I'll be able to move out to the cottage, and you can then devote yourself wholly to your new career," and, with the firm resolve to bury her bitter past at once, and forgetting self, to live wholly for her children, the noble, though sorrow-haunted woman, improved steadily each day, and one pleasant morning Captain Ryan Daley, the good-hearted officer, called for the trio in a carriage and drove them out to the little cottage, which he playfully called Wizard Hall.
 It was a charming little cottage, with large trees upon one side, a lawn sloping down to an inlet of the Long Island Sound, a vegetable garden, a stable, a meadow lot, in which an Alderney cow was grazing, a henery, with a large number of choice fowls, and beds of flowers that at once caught the eye of Pearl.
 The place was in perfect condition, the garden flourishing, the house well and completely furnished, and the store-room and cellar well stocked, while the coal-bin and wood-shed were

filled, the captain remarking that his brother had been a most liberal provider, and telling the story without a flush of his honest face, for he had placed all there himself.

"I shall soon get well here, captain Daly, and I know not how to thank you for all your kindness," said Mrs. Raymond, the tears coming into her beautiful eyes.

"It is a kindness for me, madam, to have the place occupied by good tenants, and I must tell you that in yonder little cabin on the hill lives an old negro and his wife, who will do odds and ends for you when you need them for very small pay."

"Now, Wizard Will, I shall give you a week's leave to get settled in your new home, and then you can set to work raising your League of Boy Detectives, whom I shall put great faith in," and, promising to come out and dine some Sunday with them, the noble-hearted police captain—whose daily intercourse was with criminals, who was hourly amid desperate and tragic scenes, whose will was iron, whose nature knew no fear, but who had the heart of a woman for deeds of kindness—took his leave and returned to the city, leaving the mother and her children to make themselves perfectly at home in Wizard Hall.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER a happy week spent at his little home on the sound, Wizard Will returned to his duties in town.

He had made friends with the old negro and negress in the cabin on the hill near the cottage, and had found them most willing to do all in their power to help his mother, and had secretly made an arrangement with them to look after matters in his absence, the old man to look after the horse, and his wife to milk the cow.

He had also ingeniously attached a wire from the cottage to the cabin, with a bell at the latter, so that his mother could call for aid if she needed it.

With country air, pretty scenery, pleasant quarters, fresh milk and vegetables, and no worry about their daily bread, Mrs. Raymond rapidly improved in health, and life became worth the living for her, as she strove hard to shut out the past.

Pearl started to school and made friends, and some kind-hearted neighbors called upon the new-comers, so that the mother and daughter were not wholly alone, while Wizard Will, when at home, gave them many a pleasant drive about the country, and row or sail upon the Sound.

But Will did not neglect his work in the city, and, setting to work with energy and skill, he formed his League of Boy Detectives, and it was but a very short while before the police force recognized their ability and acknowledged it, treating their young captain with as much respect as they did their own commanders.

In due time Ed Ellis the kidnapper and murderer was tried, found guilty upon the testimony of Wizard Will and executed.

Mr. Rossmore came on to the trial, and urged Wizard Will once more to become his adopted son, but Mrs. Raymond would not hear to it, and also declined positively to allow her son to bring the kind-hearted gentleman out to see her, as he wished to do.

Will felt hurt at this, especially as his mother gave no other reason for her strange conduct than that she would not see any strangers.

With deep regret at Will's refusal to go with him Mr. Rossmore returned to his home in Maryland, and the boy settled himself to hard work to win greater fame in the career which he had drifted into by accident.

Though he had several times seen Colonel Ivey in the street he had avoided him, as his mother had earnestly requested him to do, and the gallant soldier little dreamed that the name his eyes fell upon now and then in the papers as Wizard Will, was the one whose three-dollar gold-piece he had found on Thanksgiving morning, and still wore as a charm upon his watch-chain, while he deeply mourned for the woman he had learned to love, and the children who had crept into his heart as though they were his own flesh and blood.

One of the first duties that the brave young officer set for himself to accomplish with his juvenile band of Secret Service scouts was the running to earth of the "Land Sharks," and how he accomplished the giant task is written in the Police History of New York City, wherein no name stands out in bolder relief than that of Wizard Will, the Boy Ferret of New York.

See companion story "Wizard Will's Street Scouts," Half-Dime Library No. 454.

THE END.

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